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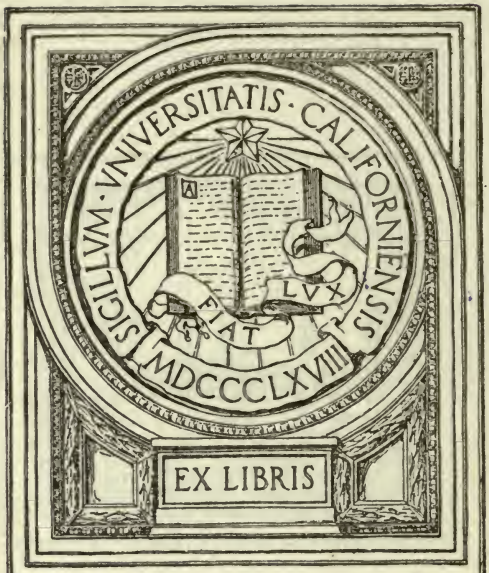

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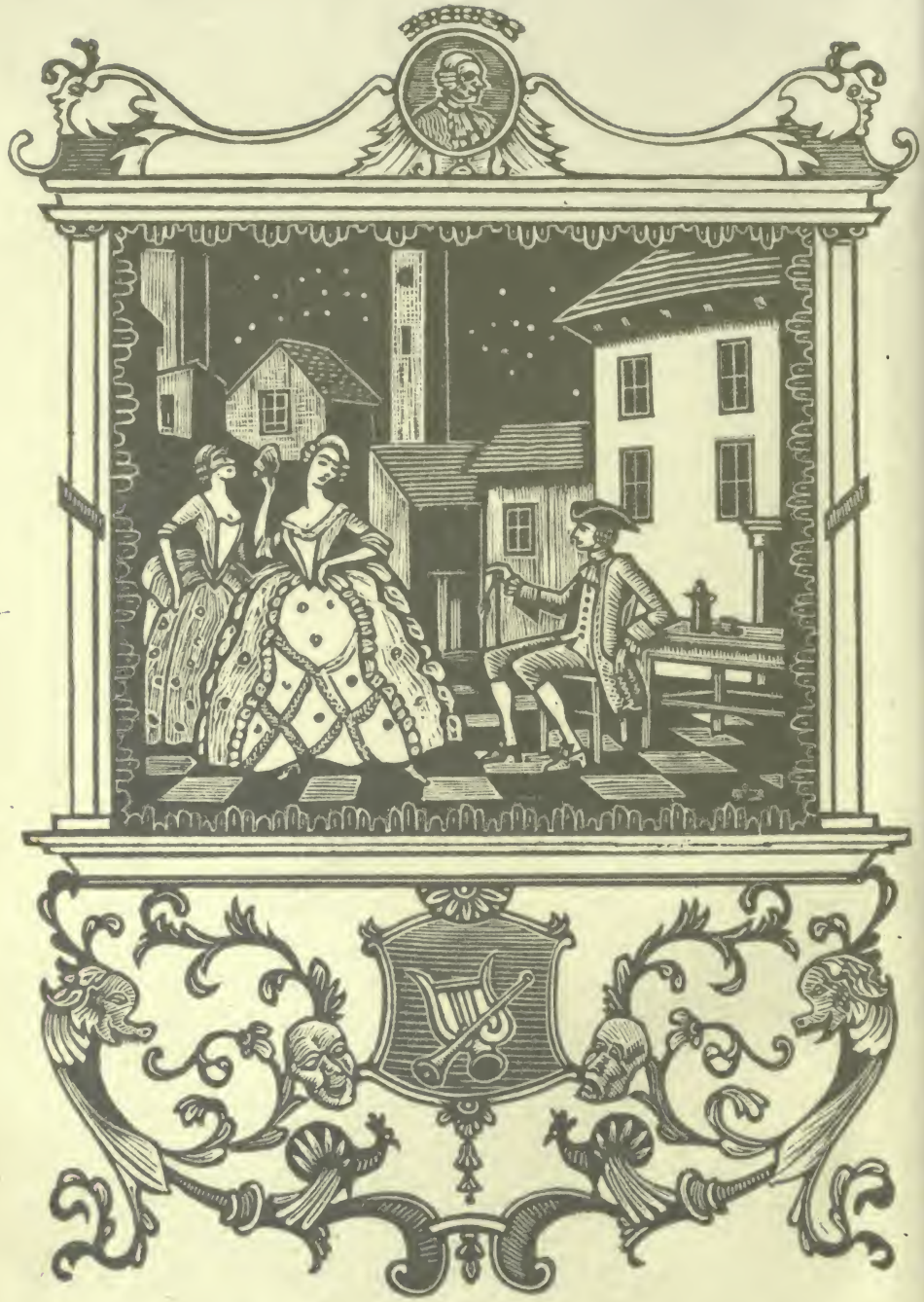
THE GOOD-HUMOURED LADIES



UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

THE GOOD-HUMOURED LADIES

A

COMEDY.

By *CARLO GOLDONI.*

Translated from the *Italian*

By *RICHARD ALDINGTON.*

To which is prefix'd
An ESSAY *on* CARLO GOLDONI
By *ARTHUR SYMONS.*

The whole embellish'd with Cuts
By *ETHELBERT WHITE.*

LONDON:
Published by C. W. BEAUMONT at 75 Charing Cross Road,

MDCCCCXXII.

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MAIN

THIS BOOK

The first *English* Translation of GOLDONI's Comedy *The Good-Humoured Ladies* is DEDICATED IN ALL HOMAGE

To MADAME *LYDIA LOPOKOVA*

Who *first created* the *rôle* of MARIUCCIA in the *Ballet* of the same name founded by LEONID MASSINE on this Play,

By

Her Friend,

THE PUBLISHER.

545998

CARLO GOLDONI

CARLO GOLDONI'S genius is essentially Venetian. He himself, however, declared he was a mongrel, half Modenese and half Venetian. Giacomo Casanova's sinister genius is essentially Venetian and Spanish. Goldoni in his youth was fascinated by certain strolling players who took him by boat from Venice to Chiozza. Casanova, who was born in Venice, of Spanish and Venetian parentage, on April 7th, 1725, was the son of two strolling players. His father, Gaetano Casanova, showed the adventurous spirit of the family by running away at the age of nineteen with a young actress, Fragoletta, becoming himself an actor, before he married Zanetta Farusi. Casanova, among his infinite passions, was always ardent after young actresses : Manon Balletti, for instance, the daughter of Silvia and Mario Balletti, the famous actors of the Comédie Française.

Goldoni met, in Venice, a beautiful woman who was called Zanetta Casanova and La Buranella : she played young lover's parts in comedies, she did not know one note of music, she had a perfect ear and she pleased the public. Goldoni mentions the fact that, being in Mantua, April, 1747, his friend the Director of the Theatre Medebac secured rooms for him in the house of Madame Balletti : "C'étoit une ancienne Comédienne, qui

qui sous le nom de Fravoletta, avoit excellé dans l'emploi de Soubrette, qui jouissait, dans sa retraite, d'une aisance fort agréable, et conservoit encore, à l'âge de quatre-vingt-cinq ans, des restes de sa beauté, une lueur assez vite et piquante de son esprit." Fragoletta and Fravoletta have the same meaning in Italian. So it is the glorious Goldoni who discovers, without perhaps being aware of the fact, the girl Casanova's father had loved and left and who was the grandmother of Manon Balletti.

The very existence of Casanova's manuscripts at Dux was known only to a few, and to most of those only on hearsay; and thus the singularly good fortune was reserved for me, on my visit to Count Woldstein in September, 1899, to be the first to discover the most interesting things contained in these manuscripts. Among those I found in one of the bundles carefully preserved by Casanova a whole series of letters in French, very affectionate and intimate letters, usually unsigned, occasionally signed "B." These I knew for certain were written by Manon Balletti; Casanova refers to them on Christmas Day, 1759, when he allows Esther to read Manon's letters. "These letters," he says, "numbered more than two hundred, and the shortest were of four pages." In 1910 Aldo Ravà printed all her letters, which amount to forty-one, in *Lettres de Femmes à Casanova;* these, which are imaginative, passionate, exquisite, seem to have been written between April, 1757, and February 7th, 1760. Her last letter is dated Paris. The one before ends: *Addio, viscere mie, Coré, coré, coré.* The last, 3 *basi per jiacomo.*

In 1716 the Duc d'Orléans ordered Louis André Riccoboni to find a new company of actors. He, under the name of Lelio, and the Ballettis, played the principal parts. In 1750 Casanova arrived in Paris. Riccoboni's wife, Virginia Balletti (Flaminia), who was by no means young, the daughter of Fragoletta, who had been the mistress

mistress of Casanova's father, apart from her acting, had the vanity of imagining that she was "une femme savante." Soon after that Goldoni arrives in Paris; he stays in the house of the Riccoboni's. "C'étoit Madame Riccoboni, qui, ayant renoncé au Théâtre, faisoit les délices de Paris, par des Romans, dont le pureté du style, la delicatesse des images, la vérité des passions, et l'art d'interesser et d'amuser en même temps, le mettoient au pair avec ce qu'il a d'estimable dans la littérature Française. C'est à Madame Riccoboni que je m'adressoit pour avoir quelques notices préliminaires sur mes Acteurs Italiens."

The first Italian comedies were Bibbiena's *Calandra*, 1508, and Ariosto's *Cassaria*, which appeared in the same year. Suddenly, sweeping away the *Commedia Erudita*, surged the *Commedia dell' Arte*. Goldoni began by creating his comedies out of the old comedy of masks before, by some sudden instinct, he demolished them; so that, up to 1750, he met with no serious opposition, until two rivals rose up against him, Chiari and Gozzi; Chiari, an arrant impostor, bombastic in style, a prolific scribbler of third-rate melodramas: in a word, to use a phrase Swift would have used, a mere windbag. Just then Venice the irresponsible divided itself into factions for Chiari and Goldoni. This quarrel raged for more than five years: Goldoni's unpardonable vice in Gozzi's eyes was to have declared war on the *Commedia dell' Arte;* in Chiari's eyes the unpardonable sin was that Casanova had hissed his comedies, which he revenged in 1755 in a novel named *La Commediante in fortuna*, where Casanova was venemously depicted under the name of M. Vanesio. Among the various reasons for Casanova's arrest and subsequent imprisonment in the *Piombi*, one was that Casanova had not only hissed Chiari's comedies but had sworn to go to Padua and kill him. Casanova says to Laurent, his gaoler: "There were others besides myself who might have

have been arrested on the same charge. I wanted to go to Padua and kill him; but the Jesuit Origo insinuated that I had other ways for avenging myself for his attack on me in his miserable novel. So as I praised Chiari's comedies in the *cafés* my vengeance might have been perfect."

Meredith—I have his signed copy of the *Commedie Scelte* of Goldoni—says, sweepingly: "Goldoni sketched the Venetian manner of the decadence of the Republic with a French pencil, and was an Italian Scribe in style." There are two kinds of imagination, that which embodies and that which disembodies. Gozzi's glittering talent, Goldoni's more glittering talent, are singularly lacking in that imagination which disembodies, filling mortal things with unearthly essences or veiling them with unearthly raiment. From time to time, as Venice flashes before our vision, the misty clouds of some fabulous midnight are lifted and you are shown the moon's mocking image in the depths of a magic lantern.

To those who have seen Duse only across the footlights, Duse must be impenetrable, almost the contradiction of herself. Her face is a mask for the tragic passions, a mask which changes from moment to moment, as the soul models the clay of the body after its own changing shape. Imagine Rodin at work on a lump of clay.

clay. The shapeless thing awakens under his fingers, a vague life creeps into it, hesitating among his forms of life; it is desire, waiting to be born, and it may be born as pity or anguish, love or pride. The face of Duse is like the clay under the fingers of Rodin. But there are moments, in any crisis, when the soul seems to stand back and look out of impersonal eyes, seeing things as they are. I have seen Duse act in *La Locandiera* of Goldoni: she was wonderful. Duse is always a chalice for the wine of imagination, but in Goldoni the chalice remains empty. In the delicious part she acted she had certain little caresses; the half-awkward caresses of real people who are always very much awake, which enchants me more than any mimetic movements I have ever seen; such as a certain gentle and pathetic gesture of her apparently unconscious hand, turning back the sleeve of her lover's coat over his wrist, while her eyes fasten on his eyes, in a great thirst for what is to be found in them. Mimi Aguglia would have made Mirandolina a stinging thing that bites when it is stepped on: she always caught you in a fierce caress like a tiger-cat.

There was another play in which Duse turned slowly backwards from her sombre exit and breathed out one word: "Nulla!" That is not only fine art, it is great genius. And, as I have written, even in a Goldoni comedy or in the *Fédora* of Sardou, her acting completes our admiration of her genius, as it proves to us that she can act to perfection a part in which the soul is left out of the question—as indeed in I know not how many plays—in which nothing happens according to nature, and in which life is figured as a long attack of nerves, relieved by the occasional interval of an uneasy sleep.

What is acting? Is it to be oneself with the utmost intensity, and to put that self into every character, or is it to have no self and be a speaking mirror? In *La Città*

Morta

Morta it is Duse seen through a temperament, and the temperament is her own. Thus it is, for good and evil, to be greater than one's art. Was Rodin ever greater than his art? Never. Was Goldoni ever greater than his art? Yes, often the man was greater than his art. But Duse—who can create life in an isolation from life—has in her nature a great personal force, a force of beauty, subtlety, intelligence, intensity; she has nothing to do but to be herself, and to rest from the destroying energy of imitation. So she flings herself into the soul and body of Magda, as if a new vitality had entered into her, a new force of will. I write these notes from the remembrance of when, in 1903, the days I spent in Zurich were so intolerable that I could not disentangle my sensations, setting apart the weariness of all the hours when I did not see Duse, on the stage or off, living over again all the hours in which I was conscious of nothing but the actress or the woman.

Every dramatist has his own method of invention or of creation. The desire of every dramatist is to create over again a more abundant life, and to create it through poetry or through humour; through some force, as it were, of the imagination. It is quite possible to write poetic drama in prose—as Goldoni mostly did—though to use prose rather than verse is to write with the left hand rather than the right. Shakespeare and the Elizabethans

bethans used prose as an escape or side-issue, for variety, or for the heightening of verse. Molière used prose as the best makeshift for verse, because he was not himself a good craftsman in the art. The most magnificent play Molière wrote, *Don Juan, ou Le Festin de Pierre* (1665) is written entirely in prose; he found the subject in the masterpiece of Tirso da Molina: *El Burlador de Sevilla y Convidado de Piedra.* The *Don Juan* of Goldoni was acted for the first time in Venice during the Carnival of 1736 under the name of *Don Giovanni Tenorio Ossia il dissoluto, Commedie.* In *Tartuffe* we get a form of comedy which is almost tragic, the horribly serious comedy of the hypocrite. I said somewhere that Molière knew he was not a poet. When he ventured to write the most Shakespearean of his comedies, *L'Avare*, in prose, "le même préjugé," Voltaire tells us, "qui avait fait tomber *Le Festin de Pierre*, parcequ'il était en prose, nuisait au succès de *L'Avare.* Cependant le public qui, à la longue, se rend toujours au bon, finit par donner à cet ouvrage les applaudissements qu'il mérite. On comprit alors qu'il peut y avoir de fortes bonnes comédies en prose."

Goldoni wrote: "It was left to Molière to ennoble and render useful the comic stage, in exposing the vices and the laughable side of man to ridicule, for the purpose of correction. I was not yet acquainted with the works of that great man, for I did not understand French; but I made up my mind to learn it, and meantime I acquired the habit of drawing men more carefully, and never lost sight of an original character. So, acting upon the maxim of comedy, *ridendo castiget mores*, I imagined that the theatre might be converted into a school for the prevention of abuse and the consequences resulting from it."

I have referred to methods. Writing on Beardsley I said: "Every artist has his own secret, beyond the obvious one, of why he works. So far as it is not the mere

mere need of earning one's living, it is generally some unhappiness, some dissatisfaction with the things about one, some too desperate or too contemptuous sense of the meaning of existence. At one period of his life a man works at his art to please a woman; then he works because he has not pleased the woman; and then because he is tired of pleasing her. Work for the work's sake it always must be." Yes, every artist, from Leonardo da Vinci to Vladimir de Pachmann, has his own secret, which he guards as jealously as he guards his life and his genius. Like the art of Verlaine, the art of Pachmann is one wholly of suggestion; his fingers state nothing, they evoke. There is not a note he does not create for himself, to which he does not give his own vitality. Is it through his nerves or through ours, that this communion takes place? Could Pachmann himself explain to us his own magic? I have often asked him: "What is your method?" He always evaded the question; he could no more explain his magic than his method.

Denis Diderot, in his "Essay on Dramatic Poetry," said: "There is one method I have adopted of going about work, a successful one to which I turn whenever habit or novelty obscures my judgment—both produce this effect—and it is to seize the very thought of certain objects, transport them bodily from nature to my senses, and examine them from a point of view where they are neither too far from me, nor too near. Whether you write or act, think no more of the audience than if it had never existed. Imagine a huge wall across the front of the stage, separating you from the audience, and behave exactly as if the curtain had never risen." Now, this is exactly what Wagner did, who, as a matter of fact, set *La Donna Serpente* of Gozzi to music in 1833, which was performed in Munich; not only in his operas, but in Bayreuth, which is his creation in the world of action, as the

the music-dramas are his creation in the world of art; in a word, exactly what I saw in Bayreuth; where the solemnity of the whole thing makes one almost nervous, for the first few minutes of each act; but, after that, how near one is, in this perfectly darkened, perfectly quiet theatre, in which the music surges up out of the "mystic gulf," and the picture exists in all the ecstasy of a picture on the other side of it, beyond reality, how near one is to being alone, in the passive state in which the flesh is able to endure the great burdening and uplifting of vision.

In the method of all artists, one requires, above all, illusion. We find illusion in the *Monna Lisa;* we find illusion in one of Augustus John's pictures; we find illusion in the Russian ballets. I found illusion, a wonderful illusion, the first time I was in Venice when I gazed at midnight on the miraculous and many coloured façade of St. Mark's, on the pale, faintly tinged marble of the Doge's Palace: the illusion almost, of a ballet. Again, in Sarah Bernhardt, is it reality, is it illusion, when she plays *La Dame aux Camélias?* Trick or instinct? there it is, the power to make you feel intensely. Has Goldoni this trick and this instinct? That is a question I am not inclined to answer. "The æsthetic critic's end is reached," wrote Pater, "when he has disengaged that virtue, and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element, for himself and others, and the rule for those who would reach this end is stated with great exactness in the words of a recent critic of Sainte-Beuve: *De se borner à connaître de près les belles choses et à s'en nourir en exquis amateurs, en humanistes accomplis.*"

So, as certain people have desired to die in certain ways —*mourant de maux bizarres*—and as Russian women are as uncertain of their souls as if the black earth were secretly alive, or if sleeping were not better than thinking, I give my notes on one of the Russian ballets.

"It

"It struck me as I saw the Goldoni ballet, *Le Donne di Buon Umore*, and heard the music of Domenico Scarlatti, that all of the costumes and much of the effect of the miming—which were the most delicious and capricious that I have ever seen—had been designed after Longhi's paintings and drawings; for in many of these he gives a wonderful sense of living motion; but certainly nothing of what is abominably alive in the great and grim and sardonic genius of Hogarth.

"In Venice I have often spent delightful hours before his innumerable drawings, such as painters at the easel, ballet girls with castanets, maid-servants holding trays, music and dancing-masters (indeed, is not Enrico Cecchetti in the ballet a most admirable and most Italian dancing-master?), tavern-keepers, street musicians, beggars, waiters; the old patrician lolling in his easy-chair and toying with a fan; the *cavalieri* in their fantastic dresses; the women with their towering head-dresses. The whole sense of Venice returned to me as I saw Lydia Lopokova—always so bird-like, so like a butterfly with painted wings, so witty in gestures, so absolutely an artist in every dance she dances, in every mime she mimics, in her wild abandonment to the excitement of these shifting scenes, where all these masked and unmasked living puppets have fine nerves and delicate passions—putting powder on the face of the Marquise Silvestra and mocking her behind her back. I saw then Casanova's favourite haunts: the *ridotti*, the gambling-houses, the *cafés* in San Marco's, the carnivals, the masked balls, the intrigues; the *traghetti*, where I seemed to see mysterious figures flitting to and fro in wide miraculous *bautte* beneath the light of flickering flambeaux.

"I see before me, as I write, the night when I went from the Giudecca to the Teatro Rossini, where a company of excellent Italian comedians gave one of Goldoni's comedies,

comedies, and, as when the chatter in the gallery ends, the chatter begins on the stage, I found for once the perfect illusion; there is no difference between the one and the other. Voluble, like Venice, with its unchanging attitude towards things, the prompt gaiety and warmth of its temperament, finds equal expression in the gallery, and in the interpretation of Goldoni, on that stage. Going to the theatre in Venice is like a fantastic overture to the play, and sets one's mood properly in tune. You step into the gondola, which darts at once across a space of half-lighted water, and turns down a narrow canal between walls which seem to reach more than half-way to the stars. Here and there a lamp shines from a bridge or at the water-gate of a house, but with no more than enough light to make the darkness seen. You see in flashes: an alley with people moving against the light, the shape of a door or balcony, seen dimly and in a wholly new aspect, a dark church-front, a bridge overhead the water lapping against the green stone of a wall which your elbow all but touches, a head thrust from a window, the gondola that passes you, sliding gently and suddenly alongside, and disappearing into an unseen quiet."

We have to distinguish in Goldoni's comedies those that are written in pure Italian, among which may be comprised those written in Martellian verse; those, the majority,

majority, that are written partly in dialect and partly in Italian; those, there are eleven, which are written entirely in the Venetian dialect. It has been wittily said that some of his comedies recall one of Louis Chardon's articles in Balzac's *Grand Homme de Province à Paris*, beginning, *on entre, on sort, on se promène.* Only, in Balzac, money and the passions rule the world of *La Comédie Humaine;* and, at the root of the passions, determining their action, he saw those nervous fluids, or that unknown substance which, in default of another term, we must call the will. Money, the passion, the will, the nerves, these were some of the most essential qualities in Casanova: to Goldoni they were practically unknown. Goldoni, who says beautifully in his *Memoirs* that the Venetians sang all day long, "the shopkeepers laying out their wares; the workmen coming home from work, the gondoliers waiting for their masters," adds: "Gaiety is at the root of the national character, and jesting is at the root of the Venetian language." The day is past when the gondoliers sang Tasso: they still sang in Venice, when I was there, strange and haunting songs, one of which haunted the imagination of Wagner when he was writing *Tristan and Iseult* in one of the Palaces on the Grand Canal—those wonderful nine notes of the sailors' chorus, which always ring in my ears when I am on the sea, for they have in them all the exultation of all life that moves upon the waters.

Everyone who walks from the Piazza de San Marco in the direction of the Rialto cannot fail to see, in the Campo S. Bartolommeo, Goldoni's statue. This is my own vision of the statue when I first saw it. He stands there, looking down on the people as if he saw in them one of his comedies; firmly planted, wearing his court dress with an air, and with an intensely self-satisfied smile of amused interest on his face. If he could only turn his head,

head, he would look right up the steep, broad stairs of the Rialto, which lie there, to the right, bright with moving crowds of colour, winding up and down on each side of the central row of stalls, between the shops, hung with long coloured stripes. He stands there, looking down

upon the people.

Arthur Symons

The Play

Persons of the Play

LUCA, *deaf and old.*
SILVESTRA, *his old Sister.*
COSTANZA, *his Daughter.*
FELICITA.
LEONARDO, *her Husband.*
DOROTEA.
PASQUINA, *her Daughter.*
BATTISTINO, *fiancé of* PASQUINA.
CONTE RINALDO.
CAVALIERE ODOARDO.
MARIUCCIA, *Maid to Signora* COSTANZA.
NICCOLÒ, *Coffee-house Keeper.*
A SERVANT *who speaks.*
SERVANTS *who do not speak.*

The SCENE is at *VENICE.*

The Good-Humoured Ladies.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Costanza's Room.

COSTANZA *at her dressing-table, and* MARIUCCIA, *her maid, arranging her hair.*

COSTANZA.

IT isn't right yet.

[*Looks at herself in the mirror of her dressing-table.*

Mariuccia. Why, signora! It's done so well, you look like a princess.

Cost. Can't you see that my hair is curled in one part more than another?

Mar. No, I don't see any great difference.

Cost. It wouldn't need much for me to make you start all over again.

Mar.

Mar. I've done it twice—it can be done three times.

Cost. Yes, three, four, five, and as many times as it pleases me! I like to look well; and when a woman's head is badly dressed she can have inside it whatever you like, but she doesn't look well.

Mar. And yet you put a mask over your head and ruin the whole arrangement.

Cost. That's nothing to do with you. If I go to a ball of course I shall wear a mask, but if I stay at home and somebody comes to see me I won't have it said by any one that I haven't good taste. Last night at the dance every one came to look at my head-dress as something unique.

Mar. And didn't I do your hair last night?

Cost. Yes, but how long did we spend over it?

Mar. Not long. Only from three to ten.

Cost. Patience! So long as it's well done in the end.

Mar. Ah, signora, when you are married you won't spend so much time at your dressing-table.

Cost. Oh, as to that, my lord husband, whoever he may be, will have the goodness not to interfere with the affairs of my dressing-room!

Mar. Pardon, signora, but have you no one yet?

Cost. My father has proposed several men, but I don't like any of them. There is a certain Count who doesn't altogether displease me; but I'm not in a hurry to get married; I'm very "good-humoured," you know. I like to be happy, and if I can help it I don't want to be worried.

Mar. You're perfectly right, and I feel the same way. As long as you're free you can laugh happily.

Cost. Is my aunt up yet?

Mar. Yes, signora, she has been up a long time.

Cost. She's an old wonder! Last night she insisted on coming to the dance with me. We came home very late and yet she's up already.

Mar.

Mar. She's been up two hours. To tell you the truth I went and looked through her keyhole and saw she was dabbing herself with rouge.

Cost. Was there ever such an old woman ?

Mar. She mustn't appear too old, because she's still a maid, and I think she wants to get married.

Cost. Yes, she's a little maid of sixty !

Mar. Sixty !

Cost. Well, perhaps a little more.

Mar. To see and hear her she seems nimbler and more lively than we are.

Cost. Some one's knocking.

Mar. I'll go and see.

Cost. If it's the dress-maker, I want to see him.

Mar. Is there something fresh on ?

Cost. You'll see, you'll see. I want the neighbours to gnaw themselves with rage !

Mar. If you put on a new dress I wager that to-morrow they'll have convulsions. [*She goes out.*

Cost. When they see my jewels they'll burst with envy. My father, to give him his due, does everything I want. He's deaf, poor old man, but when I want something I know how to make him hear. [*Re-enter* MARIUCCIA.

Mar. Do you know who's here, signora ?

Cost. Who ?

Mar. Signora Felicita.

Cost. At this time ?

Mar. Yes, at this time, masked and alone.

Cost. Whip some chocolate for her.

Mar. I must go and make it fresh.

Cost. Wasn't there any left in the pot ?

Mar. Two good cups-full. But the dear old lady went down into the kitchen and drank it all, so there's not a drop left. [*She goes out.*

Cost. She does it to keep herself well, poor old creature. I'm

I'm sorry for her. It's a terrible thing for us to grow old. When I think of it I get into a cold sweat.

Enter FELICITA, *masked.*

Fel. Your servant, Signora Costanza.

Cost. Your servant, Signora Felicita.

Fel. I've taken advantage of my mask to come and see you for a while.

Cost. I'm glad you've come. The mask is a great convenience in Venice. Here a well-bred married woman can go visiting alone or look after her affairs without the least fear of observation.

Fel. I've been going about three hours already.

Cost. Bravo! I know you stayed at the dance after I'd gone.

Fel. Yes, and I danced until morning.

Cost. Sit down, you must be tired.

Fel. I'm not tired, but I'll be glad to sit down.

[*They sit down.*

Cost. How many hours did you sleep?

Fel. None at all. I haven't even touched my bed. When the dance was over I put on a mask, as you see. I went home and walked up to my room. I heard my husband snoring, and without disturbing him I went away.

Cost. You must be very sleepy.

Fel. I'd go back to the ball now, fresh as a rose.

Cost. I would gladly have stayed to the end of the ball, but that antiquity of an aunt of mine was with me and I had to go, out of pity for her.

Fel. Is the old lady still asleep?

Cost. No, indeed! She's at her dressing-table putting on her best clothes.

Fel. Did you notice last night at the ball how she flirted with Count Rinaldo?

Cost. Did I see it? Of course I did! I assure you it made me ill.

Fel.

Fel. The dear count! How nicely he took her hand!

Cost. Ah, Count Rinaldo is a young man and can be very witty. He makes love to every woman and takes the liberty of jesting with them all. But if he comes to me I'd like to make him look a fool for good and all.

Fel. I feel the same. Let us think of a pleasant trick to get some fun out of him. Let us bring this young gentleman to a standstill for a bit. We're in Carnival already and things are permitted then which couldn't be done at other times. It's sufficient that there's nothing wrong in these amusements.

Cost. Do you know what I think will make him rather annoyed? I want to write a letter to him direct, a letter full of affection and tenderness, praising his merits and good looks, and I want to make him find the letter in the café he frequents without his being able to discover who has written it. Then we'll both go masked to the café and we shall see what effect the letter has had.

Fel. Yes, that's all right. But let's do something more. Let's make him think that one of us is in love with him. We'll keep him hoping for a while and then we can make him stay fooled.

Cost. Yes, yes. With your chaperonage I can take greater liberties. Here's the chocolate. Drink it while I go and write the letter I have in mind . . . I've thought of something else too. I'll tell you when I come back. Amuse yourself till then. [*Aside.*] The count doesn't displease me at all. It may very well be that this joke won't be quite useless to me. [*She goes out. And* MARIUCCIA *comes in.*

Fel. Costanza is a girl of spirit. I like her very much.

[*Remains seated.*

Mar. Won't you have some chocolate?

Fel. I will indeed. I haven't been to sleep all night and I need something to comfort my stomach.

[*Drinks the chocolate.*

Mar.

Mar. Pardon, signora, how is Signor Leonardo ?

Fel. [*Drinking.*] My husband ?

Mar. Yes, signora. Is he well ?

Fel. [*Still drinking.*] He's quite well. Do you know him ?

Mar. Yes, signora, I know him. It's a long time since he came to play *naso* with me. Tell him that from me. He's the dearest fellow in the world.

Fel. [*Surprised.*] Do you say that of my husband ? You seem very intimate with him.

Mar. I mean, so to speak. Are you jealous ?

Fel. I might be jealous of a pretty girl, but certainly not of you.

Mar. You are right to say not of me, because you know who I am ; nevertheless . . .

Fel. [*Ironically.*] Oh, certainly ! We shall see him fall dead.

Mar. Ah, others have fallen !

Fel. [*With ironic admiration.*] For you ?

Mar. [*Seriously.*] For me.

Fel. [*Laughing.*] This makes me burst with laughing !

Mar. I'm not joking ; if I told you what Signor Leonardo said to me . . .

Fel. He treated you as the idiot you are.

Mar. Idiot to me ?

Fel. Insolent !

Enter COSTANZA.

Cost. What's the matter, Mariuccia ?

Mar. [*Not able to hide her anger.*] Nothing !

Fel. I'll tell you.

Mar. [*To* FELICITA.] There's no need to make another scene.

Fel. She told me that my husband . . .

Mar. I'm surprised at you wanting to go tittle-tattling !

Cost.

Cost. Speak with a little respect, please! Take this letter, give it to the servant and tell him to take it at once to the Café dell' Aquila, to give it to the person named, and not to say who has sent it.

Mar. [*Taking the letter haughtily.*] Yes, signora.

Cost. What are you frowning for?

Mar. Nothing, nothing, signora. [*Aside.*] Out of spite, though, I'd like to annoy the lady who called me "idiot." [*She goes out.*

Cost. Whatever's the matter with Mariuccia?

Fel. You know where rage drives people! My husband is a man who likes a joke, and she thinks he's in love with her and imagines I'm jealous. I put up with her for your sake, otherwise . . .

Cost. I'm sorry for her. She has no common sense. Anyway, the letter's gone. I didn't write it myself, because if ever this comes out I don't want my reputation to suffer. My aunt acted as secretary. I dictated it and she wrote it. But what phrases I have put in it! What love! What tenderness! I promise you when he reads it he'll be enchanted. And here's the idea that came to me afterwards. I wrote him in the letter that the unknown lady will come masked to meet him at the café, and, so that he can recognise her, she will wear a rose-coloured ribbon on her breast. So to make him furious, Signora Felicita, let us both wear a rose-coloured ribbon. Here you are—one for you and one for me; let's both go masked to the café now and enjoy the scene.

[*They put the ribbons on.*

Fel. Yes, yes, we shall have some fun out of this. But tell me, my dear, while we're playing this joke on Count Rinaldo, don't you know a better one we can work off on the Cavaliere Odoardo?

Cost. Oh, I won't get mixed up with the Cavaliere! He would be smarter than we are.

Enter

Enter DOROTEA *and* PASQUINA.

Dor. Hullo, there! No one in?

Fel. [*To* COSTANZA.] Do you hear?

Cost. It's Signora Dorotea with her daughter.

Fel. They're always going about together.

Cost. Come in, signora.

Dor. Your servant, Signora Costanza.

Cost. Servant, Signora Dorotea.

Pasq. [*To* COSTANZA.] Your devoted servant.

Cost. [*To* PASQUINA.] Your most humble servant.

Fel. [*To* PASQUINA *and* DOROTEA.] Your servant.

Dor. [*To* FELICITA.] Your most obliged servant.

Cost. [*To* DOROTEA.] You are early masked.

Dor. What does it matter? I do it to please my little girl.

Fel. But you please yourself at the same time.

Dor. Well, if you want the truth, pleasure doesn't disagree with me.

Cost. Sit down, won't you?

Dor. Thank you, signora, I am a little tired.

Cost. And you too, Signora Pasquina.

Pasq. Oh, I'm not tired!

Cost. All the same, you danced a lot last night.

Pasq. I'd be dancing now, if I could.

Dor. Sit down and do as you're told.

Pasq. We're going to the ball again this evening, mother?

Cost. We are going and we'll take you with us.

Dor. With pleasure. You know I don't dance, but I like to look on. I like to stand and watch the people.

Fel. Oh, those who don't dance just stand and see what they ought not to see and censure the doings of others.

Dor. Last night I saw some marvellous things. Did you notice Signora Lucrezia? What clothes! What jewels! I don't know how she does it.

Pasq.

Pasq. With all her clothes and jewels she dances worse than any one.

Dor. Pooh! If she can't dance well, what does it matter? She knows how to be gracious and every one was talking of her.

Cost. Ah, yes; she nauseated me with her affected compliments.

Fel. And yet when she speaks everybody stands listening to her with their mouths open.

Pasq. If they're not making a fool of her.

Cost. They joke about her.

Dor. Doesn't she make you split with laughing? Watch how she goes. [*Affectedly.*] *Your most devoted, most obliged servant. Do come here; pray be seated. Just now I am not dancing. I am a little fatigued. My fan, if you please; I am most obliged to you.*

Cost. Splendid, splendid! It's the very image of her!

Fel. What do you say of Signora Fulgenzia, who stays all the time in a corner of the room?

Dor. Oh, she, you understand . . . You know what I mean . . . She had some one with her . . . You understand.

Fel. Yes, I know all about it.

Dor. [*To* COSTANZA.] And you?

Cost. Tell me about it.

Pasq. Is this something new about Signora Fulgenzia? [*To* DOROTEA.] Has she got married?

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA.] Be quiet and don't interfere in this. She had a friend near her . . .

Cost. Who?

Fel. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] The merchant.

Dor. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] The one who spent so much.

Fel. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] Who has ruined her now.

Cost. Really?

Fel.

Fel. Didn't you know?

Dor. I will tell you about it at your convenience.

Pasq. Mother, it's getting late, and we have to go to that place.

Dor. [*Getting up.*] Yes, we must go, if you will forgive us.

Pasq. Look, mother, what lovely rose ribbons!

Dor. Both alike, too! Are they the latest fashion?

Cost. [*Laughing.*] Yes, it's a fashion just come in from France.

Pasq. Can't I have one?

Dor. They can't cost much.

Cost. They cost so little that if Signora Pasquina will take this one I'll give it her with pleasure.

Pasq. Oh, it's so good of you!

Cost. Here you are.

Pasq. I'm most obliged to you.

[*Takes it and puts it on her breast.*

Dor. And can't I have one?

Cost. You want one, too? Of course! I'll go and get one and bring it to you at once.

Fel. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] Signora Costanza, all these ribbons will confuse things.

Cost. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] No, no, the scene will be all the more amusing. [*Aloud.*] I'm going to put on my mask. I'll bring you the ribbon and we can all go out together. [*She goes out.*

Fel. [*Aside.*] Too many ribbons; there'll certainly be some mix-up.

Dor. You seem displeased, Signora Felicita, that we should have this fashionable ribbon.

Fel. Oh, it's not that. But you don't know what these ribbons mean.

Pasq. Oh, what's that? I have some a hundred times prettier.

Dor. My daughter can dress as well as any one.

Pasq.

Pasq. Have you seen my new dress ?

Fel. No, signora, not yet.

Dor. I had the stuff sent from France.

Pasq. Can I put it on to-night, mother ?

Dor. No. You must keep it for the last week of Carnival.

Pasq. [*To* FELICITA.] If you will come home with me I'll show it to you.

Fel. Oh, there'll be time enough to see it.

Pasq. [*Aside to* DOROTEA.] She's jealous.

Dor. [*Aside to* PASQUINA.] Don't tell any one that we bought it in the ghetto.

Re-enter COSTANZA *masked.*

Cost. Here you are, Signora Dorotea ; here's a ribbon for you, too.

Dor. I'm much obliged to you.

Cost. Shall we all go to the café ?

Dor. Yes ; let's go . . .

Pasq. But, mother, haven't we got to go to the jeweller ?

Dor. Yes ; we shall pass his shop.

Fel. You want to buy something ?

Dor. There's something my daughter wants.

Pasq. I want to exchange this little ring.

Cost. Let me have a look. What a pretty thing !

Pasq. It's rather small for me.

Cost. [*Gently, aside.*] Felicita !

Fel. [*Aside.*] What ?

Cost. [*Aside.*] Oh, what luck ! I saw that little ring on the Count's finger last night.

Fel. [*Aside.*] And he's given it to her ?

Cost. [*Aside.*] Of course. At the ball last night.

Fel. [*Aside.*] Hush ! We'll take advantage of it.

Dor. Signore, if you have secrets to tell each other, we'll go.

Cost.

Cost. Forgive us ; we have a little affair on.

Dor. [*Aside.*] Can't you see they've noticed the ring ? It was silly of you, Pasquina, to show it.

Fel. Come, if you're going, let's start.

Pasq. We must go to the jeweller's.

Cost. All right ; we'll wait for you at the café.

Pasq. At the Café dell' Aquila ?

Cost. Precisely.

Pasq. [*Aside.*] Yes, that's good. I may see the Count Rinaldo there. [*She goes out.*

Dor. Listen, I must confide in you. Signor Battistino gave that ring to my daughter, as he is going to marry her. But I don't want it known because I don't want it said of me . . . You understand, in these matters I'm a most sensitive woman. [*She goes out.*

Cost. What do you say to that ? What a mother !

Fel. What is the truth about the ring ?

Cost. Oh, the Count gave it to her right enough. I am absolutely certain.

Fel. If Battistino knew it ! It's true he's a poor-spirited creature ; but if he knows that I wager he gives her up.

Cost. Dorotea is a cunning woman ! She will make him believe whatever she wants.

Fel. But with all these ribbons alike how can you hope . . .

Cost. Come on, come on. I'll tell you on the way.

Enter SILVESTRA.

Silv. Well, niece, so you're going out masked, eh ?

Cost. Your servant, aunt.

Fel. Servant, Signora Silvestra.

Silv. [*To* FELICITA.] I salute you. [*To* COSTANZA.] But where are you going, signora ?

Cost. [*To* SILVESTRA.] Out for a little amusement. Can I do anything for you, aunt ?

Silv. If you're going out, I'd like to go with you.

Fel.

Fel. Go out masked and on foot? But you'll get tired, signora.

Silv. [*To* FELICITA.] I get tired? Do you think I can't walk? You make me laugh; why, I could walk farther than you. [*To* COSTANZA.] Yes, signora, I would like to come too.

Cost. I'm going with Signora Felicita on an errand. You shall come with me this evening.

Silv. No, signora; I don't want to stay at home.

Fel. Do you object to your niece coming with me? I am a married woman; there is no need for you to chaperone her.

Silv. I have not the least intention of chaperoning her. I am a virgin just as she is; and, if I am a few years older, I am not so old I must be left at home!

Fel. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] For my part, I don't in the least want her.

Cost. Look, aunt, I'm just going out on a little errand, and I'll be back almost at once.

Silv. How charming! You don't want me, eh? [*Angrily.*] You come to me another time to write letters for you!

Cost. There, aunt, there! Don't get angry.

Silv. Of course; me in the house and you out for pleasure; and with that fine rose-coloured ribbon . . .

Cost. Would you like it? It's yours.

Silv. Not at all, for this . . . All right, put it here on my breast.

Cost. Willingly, at once.

[*She takes off the ribbon and puts it on* SILVESTRA'S *breast.*

Silv. Ah! Does it look well?

Fel. Wonderfully! You are enchanting. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] What are you going to do, Costanza?

Cost. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] We'll get out of it. I have some more ribbon and I'll make another knot.

Silv.

Silv. Come back soon and we'll go to the café.

Cost. Where ?

Silv. The usual place.

Cost. I don't think I can this morning. Your servant. We'll go this evening.

Fel. This evening, at the dance.

Silv. Oh, I won't miss the dance. Last night I danced one minuet with the young Count ; this evening I want to dance half a dozen.

Fel. [*Aside.*] And you'll be the more made a fool of ! And yet if these old women find us out ! [*She goes out.*

Cost. [*Aside.*] I use her for my own ends. And yet I'm sorry for her. Youth despises age, but when we are old the same thing will happen to us. [*She goes out.*

Silv. Well, well, go where you like—you think I'm going to stay in the house ? You're idiots if you think that. I'll go and put on my mask at once. Imagine my staying at home to go to sleep ! Suppose I am a little advanced in years. My blood is warm and the heart beats fast in my breast. I am handsome and upright—I feel it, I see it ; I have all my teeth in my head—and I won't give way to a girl of twenty. [*She goes out.*

END OF ACT I., SCENE I.

ACT

ACT I. SCENE II.

A Café.

Count RINALDO *and* NICCOLÒ, *the Café-keeper.*

Count. NICCOLO!

Nicc. Most illustrious?

Count. Who brought this letter?

Nicc. I don't know, signore. It was brought while I was out. I asked the boys and they didn't know either.

Count. I don't want anything more.

Nicc. You'll stay and have some coffee?

Count. Yes; get it ready.

Nicc. The water is always hot. The coffee is ground in a moment. In two minutes it is ready. Here we don't boil the coffee in the morning to serve at mid-day, still less do we boil up again what is left over from the day before. We make it always fresh and good and quickly and with Levantine coffee. In the matter of coffee the Venetians are famous among all, not only in Venice but in other places.

Count.

Count. You are a man of wit and you haven't an equal in gossiping.

Nicc. I've always noticed that idle fellows make small fortunes. But they're calling me—you must excuse me.

[*Goes.*

Count. In this café even idle fellows wake up. But who can be this unknown mistress who writes me with such tenderness? If what she says is true, she will come to the café masked, and as a sign she will wear a rose-coloured ribbon on her breast. If she comes I'll do everything possible to find out who she is. But who can she be? I don't in the least know. I've been such a short time in Venice I know very little of the city or its people. Maybe the person who writes me is one of the ladies I saw last night at the ball. They were really charming. Could it be the little girl I gave the ring? I don't think so; she's too young to take the liberty, and I noticed that she blushed at taking the ring and perhaps if her mother hadn't been there she would not have taken it at all. Then that other lady who is called Costanza has been charming to me, but I know her, she's as crafty as the devil. She is incapable of thinking and writing with such passion. But mightn't some girl have done it to make a fool of me? . . . Here's a masked girl. I don't know when I shall see her with the rose-coloured ribbon . . . Epiphany of Bacchus! If she isn't wearing a rose-coloured ribbon on her breast!

Enter COSTANZA *and* FELICITA, *with faces masked.*

Cost. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] Stay here a little. Let me go to him first. Hide the ribbon and come in when you judge it's time. [*She goes forward.*

Count. [*Aside.*] I hope she'll let me know who she is. [*Aloud.*] Your servant, signora.

COSTANZA *bows to him without speaking.*

Count.

Count. I was impatient in my desire to see you.

Cost. Are you speaking to me ?

Count. I should be fortunate if I could merit the honour of serving you.

Cost. Me, signore ?

Count. Yes, you, most charming mask—I am speaking to you.

Cost. Do you know me ?

Count. As a matter of fact, I don't, yet.

Cost. Well, then ! People don't speak in that fashion to a masked lady they don't know.

Count. Signora, if I do not know you by your face, I know you by the sign.

Cost. By what sign ?

Count. By this rose-coloured ribbon.

Cost. Oh, that ! How do you know there are not more ribbons like it in Venice ?

Count. [*Aside.*] From her voice I think it's Signora Costanza. If I can I will make sure. [*Aloud.*] Most gracious mask, will you take coffee ?

Cost. No, signore, I thank you. If my husband comes by I don't want him to recognise me.

Count. Are you married ?

Cost. To my cost. I have six children, four at home, one with a wet nurse, and one on the way.

Count. [*Aside.*] If that's so then she isn't Signora Costanza.

Cost. [*Aside.*] The joke is getting glorious !

Count. Tell me, please, are you perhaps the fair unknown who wrote me this letter ?

Cost. I ? But I can't read or write.

Count. Then you are a common woman ?

Cost. I'm surprised at you. Be careful what you're saying. You can't know who is under this mask.

Count. But you said you couldn't read or write. . . .

Cost.

Cost. I say "yes" or I say "no," as I choose and please.

Count. Tell me the truth, I beg of you, did you write me this letter ?

Cost. I swear to you on my honour that I did not write it.

Count. [*Aside.*] Then it can't be she.

Cost. Count, you make me laugh.

Count. You know me then ?

Cost. Of course.

Count. You've seen me before ?

Cost. Both seen and spoken with you.

Count. Where ?

Cost. Do you know, I've forgotten.

Count. Ah, signora, I see you want to make fun of me. You are playing with me—unmask yourself.

Cost. I can't do it when I'm alone. [*To* FELICITA.] Come here, dear.

[FELICITA *comes forward and discloses the ribbon.*

Count. [*Aside.*] Here is another ribbon ! What confusion is this ?

Fel. Your servant, Count.

Count. You know me too ? And you both have rose-coloured ribbons ? Which of you is "she" ?

Fel. I am "she" for sure.

Cost. And I certainly am "she."

Count. But which of you two wrote me this letter ?

Fel. Not I.

Cost. No, nor I.

Count. But at least you can tell me who wrote it ?

Fel. If I know, I won't let myself know.

Count. Ah, you wrote it !

Fel. On my word of honour, no.

Count. [*To* COSTANZA.] Then it was you.

Cost. I ? I don't think it of you.

Count.

Count. Well, if that's so, you can go away, ladies.

Cost. What exquisite politeness!

Fel. What wonderful good-breeding!

Cost. Are you the shop-keeper?

Fel. Are such insults offered to gentlewomen?

Count. But if you think you can make a fool of me . . .

Fel. Won't you at least offer us some coffee?

Count. Of course, immediately. [*Shouts loudly.*] Coffee!

Niccolò. [*Within.*] Coming!

Count. [*Aside.*] If they unmask, I shall know them. [*To* COSTANZA.] You'll drink some coffee, signora?

Cost. I'll do what the company does.

Count. Splendid! I want some badly.

Niccolò. [*With coffee-pot and cups on a silver tray.*] Here is the coffee.

Count. Pray sit down.

Fel. I prefer not.

Cost. And I also.

Count. [*To* FELICITA.] Much sugar?

Fel. Rather much.

Count. [*Putting sugar in the cup.*] So?

Fel. Just a little more.

Count. And you?

Cost. That is just right.

Count. But you can't drink with a mask on.

Cost. You drink, signore.

Count. [*Handing the cup to* COSTANZA.] You take it first. This is your cup.

Cost. Oh! There's my husband!

Fel. Oh! There's my brother! [*To* COUNT.] Your servant.

Cost. [*To the* COUNT.] I bid you farewell.

Fel. Keep it hot for us.

Cost. We'll drink it to-morrow.

Fel. The writer of the letter bids you farewell. [*Goes.*

Cost.

Cost. The wearer of the ribbon makes you her most humble curtsey. [*Goes.*

Enter NICCOLÒ.

Nicc. Coffee, sir ?

Count. Go to the devil !

Nicc. [*Aside.*] These Venetian girls know what they're doing ! [*Goes.*

Then enter DOROTEA *and* PASQUINA.

Count. I'll follow them, I'll find out who they are . . . Here are more masks wearing ribbons on their breasts ! Who knows if one of these . . . I'm utterly confused ! These Venetian girls want to make an idiot of me !

Dor. [*Aside to* PASQUINA.] Costanza and Felicita are not here. We'll wait till they come.

Pasq. [*Aside to* DOROTEA.] Look, mother, there's the little Count who gave me the ring.

Dor. [*Aside to* PASQUINA.] Yes, yes ! Hush ! We'll make him talk a little.

Count. [*Aside.*] These cursed ribbons fill me with confusion.

Dor. Your servant.

Count. Humble servant.

Pasq. I salute you.

Count. My lady.

Dor. You are very haughty to-day.

Count. I don't understand you, signora.

Dor. I know what I'm talking about. The Count doesn't bother any more with old friends.

Count. I have no real friendship in Venice. But be good enough to tell me who you are.

Dor. My name is Pandora.

Count. [*To* PASQUINA.] And you ?

Pasq. My name is Narfisa.

Count. Two lovely names ! Bravo, ladies ! Come, I know you like to amuse yourselves and that you love to fool

fool a poor foreigner. But I warn you that if I start I can pay you back in your own coin.

Dor. You are wrong; in Venice we don't make fun of foreigners. Have you ever been fooled here?

Count. Ah, indeed, and in what a fashion! Would you like to know how I've been fooled? I'll read you a letter that's worth a treasure. [*Aside.*] In reading it I may be able to find if either of them wrote it. [*Aloud.*] Listen. [*Reads.*] "Adorable Count." That's me!

Pasq. But isn't it well said?

Count. Does it appear to you that I'm adorable?

Dor. But don't you know who wrote it?

Count. I haven't found out yet. But listen to what flattering titles I am given. [*Reading.*] "Adorable Count."

Dor. That at least is not badly said.

Pasq. It does justice to merit.

Count. Thank you, ladies, for your good opinion of me. [*Aside.*] If they praise the letter it looks as if it comes from one of them. [*Aloud.*] Listen to its beginning. [*Reads.*] "An unknown mistress has consecrated her heart to you and sighs for you day and night." For me! Don't you see how this unknown person mocks at me?

Dor. But does that seem mockery to you?

Pasq. Don't you deserve it?

Count. [*Aside.*] I swear one of them wrote it!

Dor. Finish reading it.

Pasq. [*Aside.*] I'm curious to know who it is.

Count. Listen, this is the best of it. [*Reads.*] "The unknown, who loves you, keeps herself still hidden for her reputation's sake. But to-day you will see her with her face masked, and for a sign she will have a rose-coloured ribbon on her breast."

Dor. Oh! The deuce!

Pasq.

Pasq. I thought so!

Count. Tell me, ladies, is this ribbon worn on the breast by all the women of Venice?

Dor. Why?

Count. Because just now I saw two other ladies with similar ribbons—exactly like yours.

Dor. Really?

Count. Yes, most certainly.

Dor. [*Calling to* PASQUINA.] Mask, a word with you. [*Aside to* PASQUINA.] What do you say, Pasquina? That letter was written by Costanza!

Pasq. [*Aside to* DOROTEA.] I think so too; she's quite capable of doing it.

Dor. [*Aside.*] Don't let any one else find it out.

[*Coming back to her place.*

Count. [*Aside.*] These secrets of theirs make me more certain that this letter comes from their hands.

Dor. Have you any suspicions of whom the letter comes from?

Count. I would tell you if I did not fear to be presumptuous.

Dor. Come, tell us?

Count. I think that the writer of it is not very far from me now.

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA.] That's for you, mask!

Pasq. For me?

Count. If I am not mistaken, if the letter is sincere, why do you not do me the honour of unmasking?

Pasq. But I didn't write it!

Dor. Do you know who wrote it? The girl to whom you gave the ring!

Count. How do you know I gave a ring?

Dor. We know everything, signore.

Pasq. We've seen it, moreover, and know that it is a handsome little ring.

Count.

Count. Tell me, are you Signora Pasquina?

Pasq. I Pasquina? No, Signore!

Count. [*To* DOROTEA.] And you, Signora . . .

Dor. Do you know who I am? Costanza.

Count. Signora Costanza! That beautiful, graceful girl who so delighted me at the ball last night? She who shone among them all, and was brilliant as a star?

Pasq. [*Aside.*] How he praises her!

Dor. You are jesting, signore. Costanza does not merit this praise. The lady to whom you gave the ring is younger and more beautiful.

Count. Signora Pasquina has her merits. I don't deny it; but in comparison with you I count her as nothing.

Pasq. [*Loudly to* DOROTEA.] Mask, let us go!

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA.] Wait a minute, wait a minute! [*To the* COUNT.] Then Signora Pasquina does not please you?

Count. I tell you, she does not displease me. But I'm not in love with her, and then there's that old horror of a mother of hers whom I can't stand.

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA.] Mask, let us go; it's late!

Count. Will you go so soon? Won't you take a little coffee?

Dor. [*To the* COUNT.] No, thanks. [*Aside.*] Fool of an ass! [*To* PASQUINA.] Let us go and alter our disguise so that he can't recognise us if he meets us again.

Count. [*To* DOROTEA.] Signora Costanza, I love you; I esteem and reverence you above all women, and if you spoke sincerely in this letter . . .

Dor. The letter is not mine; I say so and I mean it; and no modest girl would write letters to a foreigner. Costanza thanks the Count for his kindness and in return begs him to go and split hairs. [*Goes.*

Pasq. And I say the same, bidding you farewell. [*Goes.*

Count. Damn Signora Costanza and all these she-devils who

who come persecuting me! But how do I know for certain that this last mask was Signora Costanza? It seems to me impossible that so well-bred a girl could be capable of such rudeness.

Enter SILVESTRA.

Silv. [*Aside.*] I've looked for them everywhere and can't find them. Where can they have hidden themselves?

Count. Well, perhaps I shan't find out who wrote the letter after all. . . . Oh! Here's another mask wearing a ribbon!

Silv. [*Aside.*] There's the young foreigner I danced with last night.

Count. [*Going.*] I won't go from bad to worse; it's best for me to leave.

Silv. [*To the* COUNT.] I beg you, signore.

Count. What can I do for you?

Silv. You're not going away so quickly?

Count. Indeed I was going.

Silv. Please—listen to one word.

Count. Can I be of service to you? Do you want anything?

Silv. Ah, if you will favour me, you will not refuse your graces.

Count. [*Aside.*] She seems a little more amiable. [*Aloud.*] Will you take coffee?

Silv. I don't like being here alone.

Count. Isn't it enough to have the company of a man of honour, of a gentleman?

Silv. Ah, well, I won't be unjust to you.

Count. Shall I order it then?

Silv. It would be kind of you.

Count. Coffee! [*Aside.*] If she's not fooling like the others I shall see her face at least. [*Aloud.*] Do sit down.

Silv. You should sit down. You danced so much last night that you must be still tired.

Count.

Count. Yes, I did dance a lot. But were you at the ball ?

Silv. Yes, signore, and I danced with you there.

Count. To tell you the truth, I danced with a great many ladies.

Silv. But I know that you danced with pleasure with me.

Count. May I know who you are ?

Silv. Guess.

Count. Masks confuse me so that I can't guess. But what confuses me still more is that confounded rose-coloured ribbon.

Silv. This ribbon ?

Count. Yes, that, because I have received a letter to say that I should see it on the bosom of one who loves me.

Silv. Pardon me, but does the letter begin : "Adorable Count" ?

Count. Yes, it does—here it is. You know about it then, and can tell me who wrote it ?

Silv. As a matter of . . . The hand-writing is mine.

Count. Are you, then, the unknown who loves me ?

Silv. [*Aside.*] Since Costanza's not here I'll try my luck. [*Aloud.*] Yes, signore, I am she who, as the letter says, sighs for you night and day.

Count. Fortune, I thank thee ! At last I have discovered what I wanted so much to know ! But can I hope, signora, that your heart is sincere ?

Silv. Good heavens ! Infinitely sincere ! Girls like me are incapable of telling lies.

Count. O Heaven ! Are you a virgin, young lady, or married ?

Silv. Oh, I'm still a virgin.

Count. [*Aside.*] I am dying to see her face. [*Aloud.*] Coffee !

Nicc. Here, sir, ready.

[*With coffee-pot and cups on a tray.*

Count.

Count. Unmask, signora!

Silv. Is there no one about?

Count. No one. [*Aside.*] Now I shall see her!

Silv. [*Unmasking.*] Here I am. Do you know me?

Count. [*Aside.*] O my God!

Silv. What's the matter?

Count. Nothing, nothing!

Silv. You feel ill?

Count. A little.

Silv. Poor thing! Let me look after you.

Count. [*Aside.*] Oh, damn you!

Silv. Is this coffee good?

Nicc. No need to ask, I made it on purpose.

Silv. Put in plenty of sugar, I like it sweet, don't you, Count?

Count. Yes, sometimes. [*Aside.*] But to-day it's bitter for me.

Silv. More sugar.

Nicc. What, more?

Silv. Yes, more. [*Drinks coffee.*] Ah, that's good!

Nicc. [*Aside.*] Count.

Count. [*Aside.*] What do you want?

Nicc. [*Aside.*] I rejoice with you.

Count. [*Aside.*] What about?

Nicc. [*Aside.*] This piece of good fortune.

Count. [*Aside.*] Are you making fun of me too?

Silv. [*Licking the sugar from the bottom of the cup.*] Ah, how good this sweet is!

Count. [*Aside.*] It turns my stomach at the moment.

Silv. Count, shall we go?

Count. Go, if you like.

Silv. Am I not worthy of your company?

Count. I have something else to do.

Silv. What, do you treat a gentlewoman like that? Come with me; give me your hand!

Count.

Count. Where do you want to go, signora ?

Silv. Home.

Count. What will they say if a maiden, a virgin, is seen going home with a foreigner ?

Silv. They can say what they like. No one commands me ! And I am marriageable, so give me your hand.

Count. I am here at your service. [*Aside.*] Must humour the old woman.

Silv. Ah, my blessings upon you !

END OF ACT I, SCENE II.

ACT II. SCENE I.

A Room.

Enter MARIUCCIA *and* LEONARDO.

Mar. COME in, come in, Signor Leonardo ; there's no one here ?

Leon. No one ?

Mar. Nobody. I am really all alone. There's the old man who never goes out, but he doesn't count ; he's so deaf we can talk as we like.

Leon. My wife hasn't been here ?

Mar. Yes, signore, Signora Felicita was here ; but she has gone out to amuse herself with my mistress.

Leon. That woman puts me out of all patience.

Mar. To tell you the truth, I don't know how you put up with her. Masked every day, every evening at the theatre, every night at a ball.

Leon. And I, poor man, up at dawn. I'm at work all day and in bed at the first hour of the night.

Mar.

Mar. Shall I tell you what you are? You're a putty man.

Leon. Signora Mariuccia, you take too much of a liberty!

Mar. Oh, I speak frankly. When I like a person I speak with my heart in my mouth.

Leon. Why, do you like me?

Mar. Can you doubt it? If it weren't so I should not tell you.

Leon. Dear Mariuccia, I thank you for your kindness to me; but remember that I am married and that you are still a virgin.

Mar. Why! Can't I like some one without meaning harm? Don't think that I mean anything wrong. I love you as if you were my father; you seem to me a good man—I would do anything for you.

Leon. [*Aside.*] She seems to mean it. How happy I should be if she were my wife!

Mar. [*Aside.*] I don't care a fig about him. But if I can I should like to annoy his wife. [*Aloud.*] Why didn't you come to see me sooner?

Leon. I like to see you, but I have so much to do; I'm alone in the house and have all the drudgery.

Mar. While your wife enjoys herself.

Leon. While my wife enjoys herself.

Mar. And spends and gambles and wastes money stupidly.

Leon. And if I spend sixpence she shrieks, yells, and tears my eyes out!

Mar. Well, I can't help saying it, but you're a great simpleton.

Leon. You're trying to hurt me.

Mar. I talk so out of love. When I like a person I can't restrain myself.

Leon. Well, you'll see what will happen to my dear wife.

Mar.

Mar. What shall I see ?

Leon. You'll see, you'll see, I tell you. We have no servant in the house now because no one can stand her more than a week. Yesterday my lady took off with her the keys of the cupboard, the wardrobe and the side-board, and to avoid a quarrel I went to bed without any supper. This morning I am still waiting for her. I'm hungry and I haven't a damned farthing to bless myself with.

Mar. Poor stupid !

Leon. Don't make fun of me.

Mar. No, no ; wait a minute ! Before Signora Felicita comes back would you like me to get you some good soup ?

Leon. Some soup ?

Mar. Yes, chicken broth, with good parmesan in it.

Leon. I don't want . . .

Mar. Ah, you fool !

Leon. But you're always . . .

Mar. Hush, hush, and wait ! I'll go and order your soup and warm your stomach a little for you. So they took away your keys ? Ah, poor fellow ! [*Goes.*

Leon. It's good of her who can only abuse people. But it doesn't seem such a strange thing to me. I'm used to enduring much worse from my wife.

Mar. [*Re-enters with a table-cloth and a plate with cover.*] While the broth is cooking and the soup's being made I'll get ready all that's needed for my dear Signor Leonardo. Help me to pull this little table over here.

[*They pull the table to one side.*

Leon. But is any one else coming ?

Mar. What does it matter ?

Leon. Is Signor Luca here ?

Mar. The deaf old fellow's here but he knows nothing about it.

Leon. I don't want it said . . .

Mar.

Mar. Ah, you're a great imbecile !

Leon. Thanks !

Mar. Sit down, here's your soup.

[*A servant brings in the soup and* MARIUCCIA *forces him to sit down.*

Leon. [*Aside.*] What's she up to ? But since I'm here I won't say no.

Mar. [*Aside.*] I'd give a scudo if his wife would only come in now.

Leon. I can hear some one coming.

Mar. Sit still ; don't be shy of any one.

Leon. [*Trying to get up.*] But I don't want . . .

Mar. Stop him, Bertoldino.

[*Makes him sit down and then goes to see who is coming.*

Leon. You make my anger rise in me, but I swallow it down. [*Eats.*

Mar. Do you know who it is ?

Leon. Who ?

Mar. Signor Battistino, Pasquina's lover—that stupid, that blockhead.

Leon. I don't like this. I don't want it said to my wife . . .

Mar. Do you want her to treat you like a baboon ?

Leon. But, but . . .

Mar. Oh, go on eating !

Enter BATTISTINO.

Batt. May I come in ?

Mar. Come in ! Here's the wiseacre !

Batt. [*Seeing* LEONARDO *eating.*] Ah ! May it do you good.

Leon. Look here—they forced me to do it.

Batt. [*Aside.*] It makes my mouth water. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] I was told my Pasquina has been here. Is that so ?

Mar.

Mar. Yes, she's been here. She was with her mother and they both went out again with my mistress.

Batt. They must have gone to the piazza to see the puppet-show—I'll go there, too.

Mar. Yes, go and see your own portrait.

Batt. My portrait?

Mar. Yes, if you want to see a fine zany, look in the mirror!

Batt. [*Displeased, to* LEONARDO.] She's making fun of me.

Leon. That's a sign that she likes you.

Batt. [*Delighted, to* MARIUCCIA.] Is that so?

Mar. Of course—monstrously.

Batt. Well, if you like me, give me something to eat.

Mar. Poor little boy, would you like some pap?

Leon. [*Ceremoniously.*] Friend, if you'll honour me, pray join me.

Batt. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] With your permission?

Mar. Sit down, sit down.

Batt. As far as I can see we haven't much to play with.

Leon. The soup was good, but I've eaten most of it.

Mar. Would you like a little stew?

Batt. Would to heaven!

Leon. I shouldn't refuse.

Mar. I'll bring you some at once. [*Aside.*] I hope Signora Felicita will come. I'd do anything to make her jealous of me. [*Goes.*

Batt. What a splendid girl Mariuccia is!

Leon. Why, didn't you know that? Servants do this sort of thing. They love to follow at their masters' heels, and if their mistresses are out on pleasure they also like to have company!

Batt. I shouldn't like Signor Luca to come here. He's a man who frightens me when I see him.

Leon.

Leon. Don't trouble—let her think about that.

Mar. [*With two plates and cover.*] Here are two stews.

Batt. Oh, great !

Mar. And four rissoles.

Batt. Oh, splendid !

Leon. You are too generous, Mariuccia.

Mar. [*To* LEONARDO.] All for you.

Leon. For me ? [*Eats.*

Mar. Yes, for you.

Batt. And for me ? [*Eating.*

Mar. For you, too.

Batt. Mariuccia likes me ; don't you ?

Mar. Yes, indeed, idle fellows delight me.

Batt. [*To* LEONARDO.] She's speaking to you.

Leon. She's speaking to you.

Mar. Oh, may you be gilded, both of you !

Luca. [*Outside.*] Mariuccia !

Batt. [*Getting up timidly.*] Signor Luca !

Leon. [*Getting up.*] Let's go at once.

Mar. Oh, be quiet and don't be such cowards.

Luca. [*Outside.*] Mariuccia !

Leon. Answer him at least.

Mar. He's deaf, he wouldn't hear.

Batt. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] Go away, we can eat without him !

Mar. It's too late, here he is.

Enter LUCA.

Luca. Where the devil is she ? [*Sees the other two bowing.*] Hey, hey ! Your servant, gentlemen. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] Who are they, hey ?

Mar. [*Not very loudly.*] Don't you know them ?

Luca. [*Not hearing.*] What ?

Mar. [*Louder.*] Don't you know them ?

Luca. [*Putting on his spectacles.*] I don't know them.

Leon.

Leon. [*Speaking to him from one side.*] Your servant Leonardo.

Luca. [*Not hearing* LEONARDO.] What ?

Batt. [*Speaking to him from the other side.*] Your servant Battistino.

Luca. [*Not hearing* BATTISTINO.] Eh ?

Leon. Pray excuse me.

Luca. What d'you say ?

Leon. [*Shouting.*] Excuse me.

Luca. What's he scream like that for ? Does he think I'm deaf ? [*Calling.*] Mariuccia !

Mar. Signore.

Luca. No answer ? Mariuccia !

Mar. [*Much louder.*] Signore !

Luca. Who asked them here ?

Mar. Signora Silvestra.

Luca. Who ?

Mar. [*Louder.*] The old woman.

Luca. What ?

Mar. [*Louder still.*] The old woman. Devil take you, you make me lose my breath !

Luca. Are you my sister's friends ?

Leon. Excuse me, signore ; I came here to look for my wife and to visit the ladies of the house. They are all out and while waiting I was accommodated here.

Luca. I've got a cold in my ear to-night ; I can't hear very well on that side ; please come on the other.

[*Remains turned to* LEONARDO.

Leon. As you are on that side, Battistino, make our excuses.

Batt. Signore . . . I wish to say . . . we took the liberty . . . having come to find the ladies we haven't found . . .

Luca. [*To* LEONARDO.] Are you speaking ?

Leon. [*Pointing to* BATTISTINO.] No, signore, he is.

Luca.

Luca. Oh, he was behind me, and I wasn't troubling about him.

Mar. [*Aside.*] I shall split with laughing.

Leon. [*Making signs that he wants to eat at the table.*] You permit, signore ?

Luca. [*To* LEONARDO.] You want to go away ? Pray do.

Batt. [*To* LUCA.] The stew's getting cold.

Luca. [*To* BATTISTINO.] Well, go, if you wish.

Leon. [*To* LUCA.] We were enjoying four rissoles.

Luca. [*To* LEONARDO.] If I can serve you, pray command me.

Batt. [*To* LUCA.] I'm going to finish eating.

Luca. [*To* BATTISTINO.] Your servant !

[LEONARDO *and* BATTISTINO *return to the table and eat.*

Luca. Mariuccia.

Mar. Signore.

Luca. Now they've gone away, I want you to tell me who they are. [*Turns and sees them at the table eating.*] Oh, ho ! May your food do you good, signori ! They are enjoying themselves. Since my goods go off like that and others eat, at least I'll eat too. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] A plate and cover for me.

Mar. At once, signore. [*Aside.*] He's right in what he says—his expense is the least in this house. [*Goes.*

Luca. Are you satisfied, gentlemen ?

Leon. Sir.

Luca. What ?

Leon. Make yourself comfortable about that.

Luca. You say what ?

Leon. [*Aside.*] I didn't say anything else.

Luca. [*To* BATTISTINO.] What did you say ?

Batt. I didn't speak.

Enter a servant bringing a plate and cover for SIGNOR LUCA *who eats with the others.*

Luca.

Luca. They never make me delicious rissoles like these.

Enter COSTANZA *and* FELICITA.

Cost. Good appetite, gentlemen!

Fel. [*To* LEONARDO.] Well done, signor husband!

Leon. If we weren't where we are I would tell you what you deserve. Isn't it enough for you to go where the devil you like that you take the keys away as well?

Fel. Oh, look at him! What a great simpleton! Poor little baby! His mammy went away and left him nothing to eat!

Leon. [*Getting up and coming forward.*] What! And you make fun of me as well?

Cost. Signora Felicita, will you make fun of your husband like this? I'm surprised at you. With a husband one is silent and respectful. And after all, he's a man and men shouldn't be spoken to like that, nor should a wife be out on pleasure all day and all night; I will tell him everything, you understand. [*To* LEONARDO.] Go and wipe your chin which is covered with stew. [*Smiling.*] Ah, oh!

[LEONARDO *goes to the table and wipes his mouth with a napkin.*

Fel. [*Laughing, to* COSTANZA.] You are very gracious.

Cost. [*To* FELICITA.] Are you afraid of him?

Fel. [*To* COSTANZA.] Not a bit!

Leon. [*To* FELICITA.] I won't put up with this life.

Cost. He's right; this sort of life can't go on. You out all day on pleasure and he dying of melancholy at home. Signore, no, it isn't right. This is what a wife should say to you as a husband: if I enjoy myself, do the same. Will you come out with me? Put on a mask and come; I shall be happy if you'll come with me. But if you like to stay at home, stay; I don't want to.

Leon. Brava, Signora Costanza! An excellent thought of a well-bred and charming young lady!

Fel.

Fel. [*Ironically.*] Ah, my husband is wonderful!
Cost. Your husband is a worthy man.
Fel. You'll see him too at the dance to-night.
Cost. Of course he'll come. Is he an ordinary person?
Fel. Leonardo loves me.
Cost. And you deserve it.
Fel. [*To* LEONARDO.] Isn't it so?
Cost. [*To* LEONARDO.] Isn't it true?
Leon. Ladies, you are a couple of devils.
Fel. Haven't you anything to do this morning?
Leon. Yes, only too much. I'm going home.
Fel. I'm not coming for the moment.
Cost. Stay and dine with me.
Fel. [*To* LEONARDO.] Does it please you?
Cost. Of course it pleases him.
Fel. Thank you, husband.
Cost. Give him the keys.
Fel. Oh, of course; here you are. [*Gives him the keys.*
Cost. Don't be ill at ease.
Fel. But go away.
Cost. Amuse yourself.
Fel. I'll see you to-night.
Leon. I'm so confused and stunned I don't know where my head is. [*Goes.*
Fel. You've made me laugh indeed.
Cost. That's how to do it. What is the use of screaming and raging at men? With good grace you achieve more and risk less.
Batt. [*Aside.*] Pasquina hasn't returned with them. [*Aloud.*] Ladies, can you tell me anything of Pasquina?
Fel. [*To* COSTANZA.] Here's that other fool.
Cost. [*To* FELICITA.] Let's make fun of him. [*Aloud.*] What? Don't you know anything of Pasquina?
Batt. I don't know anything.
Cost. Don't you know what she's done?

Batt.

Batt. Wretched me! What has she done?

Cost. [*To* FELICITA.] Tell him what has happened.

Fel. I? [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] What do you want me to say?

Cost. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] Let's invent something to annoy him.

Luca. Now I've eaten I feel a little sleepy.

[*Leans over the table and goes to sleep.*

Batt. Ladies, for the sake of charity, don't keep me in suspense.

Cost. Poor Battistino!

Batt. But what's happened?

Cost. Pasquina is married!

Batt. To whom?

Cost. Captain Faloppa.

Batt. Who's he?

Cost. Felicita knows him; ask her.

Fel. Yes, he's the man who came back from the Indies with a cargo of parrots.

Batt. Do you know where he lives?

Fel. In Venice.

Batt. But where?

Fel. At the far end of the Grand Canal at the edge of the lagoon.

Batt. As far as that?

Cost. As far as that.

Batt. Heavens! And where's Pasquina?

Cost. Why, with her husband!

Batt. I'll go at once . . .

Fel. Where are you going?

Batt. He must compensate me.

Cost. Who?

Batt. Captain Faloppa.

Fel. Stop!

[*They both hold him back while he struggles to go.*

Batt.

Batt. No, no!
Cost. It's too far.
Batt. No matter.
Cost. Be reasonable.
Fel. Hold him tight.
Batt. Chains shall not hold me!

[*Escapes from the ladies' hands, and, rushing off impetuously, strikes and upsets the table so that* SIGNOR LUCA *falls on the floor.*

Luca. [*On the ground.*] What has happened?
Cost. [*Helping him.*] Father.
Luca. [*Getting up.*] Ah!
Cost. Are you hurt?
Luca. What?
Cost. Do you feel any pain?
Luca. I was a little sleepy, and I don't know how I fell. Do you know how I fell?
Cost. I don't know at all.
Luca. What d'you say?
Fel. [*Very loudly.*] It must have been the cat.
Luca. The cat? Plague take it! Don't let it eat the stew. [*To* COSTANZA.] Who's she?
Fel. Don't you know me?
Luca. What?
Cost. It's Signora Felicita.
Luca. Damn the cat! Just now I couldn't feel my sciatica—now it seems to have come back. [*To* COSTANZA.] What did you say?
Cost. [*Smiling.*] I said nothing.
Luca. [*To* FELICITA.] What is it?
Fel. I didn't speak.
Luca. You're laughing, are you, silly girls? You make fun of old men? I'm in pain, and so you make fun of me. Ah, if your mother were alive I would go and have a bath at once. Patience! [*To* COSTANZA, *who*

is

is smiling.] Insolent! Don't stand there grinning at your father! [*To* FELICITA.] What d'you say?

Fel. But I didn't speak!

Luca. Oh, how polite and charming! But you'll get old in time, if you don't burst before. Men, even when they're old, are still thought something of; but when you women are old you're good only to make plasters.

[*Goes off limping.*

Fel. [*Indignantly.*] Say something in reply!

Cost. What can I say? He's my father.

Fel. These old men are always scolding at youth.

Cost. And youth makes fun of age. We are quits. But don't let us waste time on little things like that. What do you say of the ribbon scene?

Fel. I can't say anything—I shall hurt myself laughing.

Cost. But where can my Aunt Silvestra have gone?

Fel. Isn't she at home?

Cost. She at home! She went out masked after us.

Fel. Marvellous old woman!

Cost. She's unique.

Enter MARIUCCIA.

Mar. Signora, the Cavaliere Odoardo is here and would like to see you.

Cost. Let him come—I've already ordered dinner for midnight; we'll dine and have supper at the same time.

Fel. Yes, yes; at Carnival it's the rule to do things differently.

Mar. Signor Leonardo will wait for his food again to-night.

Fel. He has almost dined, hasn't he?

Mar. Certainly, I gave him dinner.

Fel. You did admirably. If your mistress permits I shall be delighted for you to do it every day.

Mar. If he didn't like me he wouldn't come to me.

Fel.

Fel. Since he likes you so much you ought to give him your wages as well.

Mar. And you wouldn't be jealous ?

Fel. Not in the least.

Mar. [*Aside.*] I'm in a devil's rage. I should like to pique her.

Fel. This makes me laugh. I know my husband and I'm sure he's incapable of loving any woman.

Cost. How can you be certain of that ?

Fel. Oh, I'm quite certain of it—and what do you think he is ? I wouldn't die of melancholy for him.

Cost. You speak excellently. Oh, here's the Cavaliere !

Fel. He'll make us laugh a little.

Cost. Yes, he's a most charming Cavaliere.

Enter the CAVALIERE ODOARDO.

Cav. Your most humble servant, ladies.

Cost. Servant, Signor Cavaliere.

Fel. Your faithful servant.

Cav. How are you getting on ? Are you well ? Have you rested after the ball ?

Cost. A little.

Fel. Not a bit.

Cav. Excellent ! Long live youth ! Apropos youth, is Signora Silvestra in ?

Cost. No, signore, she went out masked and hasn't come back yet.

Cav. Bacchus ! I would wager that I saw her just now on Count Rinaldo's arm.

Cost. It is possible.

Fel. It would be fine !

Cost. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] Suppose she met him wearing the ribbon ?

Fel. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] And that he mistook her for the letter-writer ?

Cost. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] It would be very funny.

Fel.

Fel. [*Aside to* COSTANZA.] We must make carnival.

Cav. Is there something new? Tell me.

Cost. Yes, yes, we'll tell you.

Fel. I'm tired; let's sit down.

Cost. [*Calling.*] Outside there!

Cav. I'll get them, signora. Here's one chair, here's another and here's one for me. To pass the time let us say something amusing; let's do what we always do, speak ill of some one.

Cost. Oh, I never speak ill of any one.

Fel. Nor I, certainly.

Cav. How long is it since you saw Signora Dorotea?

Cost. She was here this morning.

Fel. With her daughter.

Cost. That woman has always been a fool and will be as long as she lives.

Fel. And her daughter tries perfectly to imitate her.

Cav. I like people not to speak ill of others.

Cost. I said that to . . .

Cav. Oh, just for conversation.

Fel. You've very suddenly become critical.

Cav. I? Heaven preserve me from it! Whatever reasons I have I never criticise. For example, what does it matter to me that a wife goes out masked to theatres and balls and leaves her husband at home to mock at him? I don't want to criticise her.

Fel. [*Aside.*] Confound him! He's speaking of me.

Cost. Signor Cavaliere, were you speaking of Felicita?

Cav. I don't know. Is she here? I should be infinitely glad if she were.

Fel. Let's talk of something else. Were you at the theatre last night?

Cav. Yes, signora, I was. And I have the key to a box for to-night if you wish to come.

Cost. What comedy are they playing?

Cav.

Cav. "La Vedova Spiritosa."

Cost. Oh, I don't want to see that.

Fel. It's melancholy; it's boring.

Cav. And yet it has some laughable scenes.

Cost. Where there are no Masks, comedies are intolerable.

Cav. Some like one thing, some another.

Fel. I like to laugh, don't you?

Cav. Yes, I like to laugh, but I can laugh even when there are no Masks.

Cost. Oh, in the matter of theatres you have the worst possible taste! It's enough to say you like Martellian verses.

Cav. I certainly like them when they're well spoken.

Cost. I would like to hammer the man who invented them.

Cav. Poor man! Don't put him to shame. You must remember that it is more tiresome to write in verse than in prose; and if he takes this extra trouble there must be a reason, and the reason is that in Venice it is liked and he is forced to continue it. I would tell you more about this, but if I enlarge on it the least little bit you'll say that a long discourse bores you.

Fel. I'd begun to be bored already.

Cost. Who's coming now?

Fel. Two women, masked, and dressed like gardeners.

Cav. [*Rising.*] How much I like these gracious masks!

Cost. You like all women, Cavaliere.

Cav. No, not all. But I should like them all if all had the merit of Signora Costanza, the worth of Signora Felicita! [*Aside.*] If all women were like these I should not know how to act as a gentleman!

Enter DOROTEA *and* PASQUINA *dressed like gardener-women, with black velvet masks on, carrying baskets of fruit. They bow without speaking.*

Fel.

Fel. [*To* COSTANZA.] Do you know them ?

Cost. I ? Not in the least.

Cav. Pretty, polite, charming ! What more could they be ?

Cost. Masks, may we know who you are ?

[DOROTEA *shakes her head.*

Fel. Well, speak at least ! No ? Are you dumb ?

Cav. What good things have you in that basket ?

[*Tries to put his hand in it.* DOROTEA *raps his knuckles.*

Cav. Lord ! You're very harsh.

Cost. I'm glad. That will teach you not to meddle with people you don't know.

Fel. But I hope we shall know.

[DOROTEA *shakes her head.*

Cost. No ? You won't make yourselves known ? Excuse me, in good houses a joke is tolerated for a while, but . . . [DOROTEA *and* PASQUINA *laugh.*] You laugh ? Who are you, in the devil's name ?

Cav. Your friends, doubtless.

Fel. I wager I will say who they are ?

Cost. Who do you think they are ?

Fel. Signora Dorotea with her daughter.

Cost. It might be, but could they have dressed themselves up so quickly ?

Cav. Oh, do you think that's Signora Dorotea ? But look, what skill, what correctness ! Do you think Signora Dorotea could be so charming ?

Dor. [*Lifting her mask.*] Yes, signora, it is I !

Cav. Oh, I'd already recognised you ; I said that to make you lift your mask.

Dor. Is that true ?

Cav. Most certainly.

Cost. [*Aside.*] He's an old hand !

Fel. But what does this transformation mean ?

Pasq.

Pasq. So that we shouldn't be recognised by the Count . . .

Dor. Not a bit of it! Pasquina did it to play a joke on her Battistino.

Cav. Splendid! This kind of jest pleases me immensely. O worthy daughter of a witty mother! Disguise yourselves as gardener-women to trace a lover! What talent! Wonderful Signora Dorotea! Doubtless no one ever burns to criticise you. What do you say, ladies? Is there any chance of ill being spoken of her?

[*To* COSTANZA *and* FELICITA, *making them see he speaks ironically.*

Dor. [*Aside.*] He talks in a way I don't understand.

Pasq. Mother, I've something to say to you.

Dor. [*Coming up to her.*] What is it?

Pasq. I'm hungry.

Dor. Poor little one! We haven't dined yet.

Cav. That's what I admire, that's what I praise! Suffer hunger, to go about masked!

Dor. Do you think we haven't what we need?

Pasq. There's nothing in the house!

Dor. Be silent, impertinent child!

Cav. Signora Costanza, have you dined yet?

Cost. Not yet.

Fel. She's ordered dinner for after eleven.

Cav. Good! Without further ceremony, then, I will stay and dine with you, and with your permission, I invite these ladies, who are so courteous I am sure they will not refuse to stay.

Pasq. I'll stay. . . .

Cost. Your boldness is very charming, Cavaliere.

Cav. *Sans façons*, madam, *sans façons!* It will be delightful to have these pretty masks at table.

Fel. [*Aside.*] He seems to be master of the house!

Cav.

Cav. Signora, I hope you will not be offended at the liberty I take? I am a knight and have no need to sponge a dinner from any one. But we are in Carnival; I like merriment, and I like ladies of wit like yourselves. *Allégrement, toujours allégrement!*

Enter SILVESTRA *with the* COUNT.

Silv. Now what do you say, niece? Have I not found a handsome *cavaliere servente?*

Count. [*Aside.*] What! Is Signora Costanza the niece of this old horror?

Cost. Bravo, aunt, I am relieved.

Fel. I rejoice with you, Count.

Cav. Count Rinaldo, we all rejoice; yet I am furious with you.

Count. And why?

Cav. Because I, too, aspired to the honour of serving Signora Silvestra and you have secured her hand!

Silv. [*Aside.*] How I dislike these jealousies!

Count. My dear friend, I had no intention of insulting you, and I am ready to yield you this great honour.

Silv. No, signore, no. First come, first served.

[*To* COUNT RINALDO.

"You were the first
And you shall be
The last
That I adore."

Count. Signora, not to leave you alone I have accompanied you so far. But you are now at home, and since I find myself in a house I should never have dreamed of entering, permit me to leave.

[*Looking askance at* COSTANZA.

Silv. O, if you love me, stay!

Cost. Signore, are you in a house that frightens you?

Count. Indeed, yes, and you should know the reason.

Cost. Explain yourself, I don't understand you?

Silv.

Silv. Dear niece, do this for me, don't let him go away. [*To the* COUNT.] Ah, cruel!

Count. [*Aside.*] She makes me sick! [*Aloud.*] Don't you remember what you said to me when you were masked?

Cost. I?

Count. Yes, you told me to go and split hairs! Who was the other who said the same?

Dor. [*Aside to* PASQUINA.] Let's go—it's discovered!

Pasq. [*Aside to* DOROTEA.] I'm hungry! I shall stay.

Cav. [*Aside.*] I'm anxious to see the end of this!

Fel. I think you're dreaming, signore.

Cost. Do you think I'm capable of saying a thing like that?

Fel. True, we were the two masks with whom you spoke.

Cost. We are the two who left you with the coffee in the cups.

Count. Good heavens! Then you are those . . .

Silv. Make an end of this! The Count will stay out of love for me, won't you, my little joy?

Count. [*To* SILVESTRA.] Whatever you like. [*To* COSTANZA.] Signora, I am more confused than any man in the world. Five ribbons, all alike, have embarrassed my mind!

Cost. Here are the five ribbons! We are two, Signora Silvestra another, and the other two are there, only they have disguised themselves since.

Count. [*In amazement.*] What! Signora Dorotea!

Dor. Yes, signore.

Count. So it was you who sent me . . .

Dor. Do you remember how insolently you spoke to me?

Count. Excuse me, I didn't mean it.

Dor. Forgive me, I didn't send you with my heart.

Cav.

Cav. Splendid, splendid indeed!
Every sad memory be silent now,
And passing things slide to oblivion.

Silv. Will my little Count stay?

Cav. The Count must stay and dine with us. Isn't that so, Signora Costanza?

Cost. Your desire is law.

Count. But you say it in such a way . . .

Silv. There's no need for her to say it. I rule in this house.

Cav. Ah, yes, the oldest rules every house.

Silv. It's not that, I'm not old; I don't command because I'm old, but because I'm Signor Luca's sister. The Count will stay and dine with me, and you, impertinent, may go!

Cav. Be patient! For a jest you drive me away. But one day perhaps you'll understand the tenderness of my heart.

Silv. Ah, rascal! Come here, both of you.

Count. [*Refusing.*] Signora . . .

Cav. [*Refusing.*] No, indeed . . .

Silv. Courage! Whom do I speak to? When a lady bids, you can't say "no" . . .

Cav. She is right. Count, let us not abuse this good fortune. [*Gives his hand to* SILVESTRA.

Count. [*Aside.*] I feign for Costanza's sake. [*Aloud.*] I am here to receive your gracious kindness.

Cost. Long live my aunt!

Fel. Long live Signora Silvestra!

Silv. [*To* COSTANZA.] Go away, I won't be bothered by you.

Cost. [*Aside.*] What a lovely face! [*Goes.*

Fel. [*Aside.*] What an old fool! [*Goes.*

Silv. [*To* DOROTEA *and* PASQUINA.] And you go away too.

Pasq.

Pasq. I go, signora. [*Aside.*] If only they'd go to dinner at once. [*Goes.*

Dor. I stay so that my poor girl may eat. [*Goes.*

Silv. Now we can go on at our convenience.

Cav. You may dispose of me entirely.

Silv. [*To the* CAVALIERE.] Yes, dear. [*To the* COUNT.] And you ?

Count. As you will, signora.

Silv. I don't know what to say. My heart can only belong to one !

END OF ACT II.

ACT

ACT III. SCENE I.

A Room.

Enter COSTANZA *and* FELICITA.

Cost. COME here, Felicita; while they're laying the table I want to tell you something.

Fel. Tell me quickly then; I don't like long speeches.

Cost. I can tell you in two words. I'm afraid I'm in love.

Fel. Oh, that has never frightened me.

Cost. Well, I shan't get worried about it, either, but I don't want to get in a mess.

Fel. I suppose you mean Count Rinaldo?

Cost. Yes, exactly.

Fel. He has no wife, you have no husband. Where is the difficulty?

Cost. First of all, I don't like his being a foreigner, and I don't want to have to leave Venice.

Fel. Oh, but, believe me, that is a terrible tragedy! A woman

woman of spirit must never suppose that there is nothing good in the world outside her own country. All the world's one country; if you have money you can be happy anywhere.

Cost. Well, that's true, but I don't quite know . . .

Enter the CAVALIERE.

Cav. Signora Costanza, I'm really sorry for that poor Count Rinaldo.

Cost. What has happened?

Cav. He languishes, he dies, he sighs for you, and to comfort his anguish he has to put up with the stupidities of that foolish old woman.

Cost. Dear Cavaliere, why don't you help your friend? Why not take his place beside Signora Silvestra so that he can come here for consolation?

Cav. I would do it, but, to tell you the truth, I don't want the old woman to flatter herself with it, and I don't want to play the fool's part in the company.

Cost. If she were young you would do it willingly enough.

Cav. Signora, I am happy to be and talk with young women. I admire the beautiful, I like the witty, I try to be universal in my taste. I want to be nobody's exclusive property. I have experienced it enough; I know which system to pursue, and I'll never bind myself again.

Cost. Does the service due a woman seem so heavy to you?

Cav. A bagatelle! I remember the advice of Madame Bigue in the comedy called "Il Cavaliere Giocondo."

Fel. I know it—those follies prove nothing.

Cav. Did you hear it in prose or in verse?

Fel. In prose, in prose; I couldn't have listened to it in verse.

Cost. I would like to hear this wonderful advice that so terrifies you.

Cav.

Cav. I know it by heart; if you like, I'll repeat it.

Cost. I should like you to.

Cav. But they're in verse.

Cost. Patience!

Fel. Martellian verse?

Cav. Yes, signora.

Fel. With your permission I prefer not to be bored by it. [*Goes.*

Cav. That's that! If they don't please her she is right not to put up with annoyances. It would be foolish to pretend that what pleases one ought to please every one.

Cost. Well, let me hear these verses.

Cav. Willingly, and if I find I'm boring you I'll stop in the middle. This is what Madame Bigue says to her lover:

"Who pledges himself to love must do so at all costs; by suffering he must deserve his post; he must take harshness and reproaches in good part, and pay dear a jest or a kindness. Leave all friendships, stay in her company, change, as she changes, from grave to gay. He must not say that what pleases him is good but must conform with her notions. As she wills, he must say 'Yes' or 'No.' He must watch by night and sigh by day. Yet he must endure each time every rival at her side and grow red and pale with jealousy; he must never speak of what he has seen, hoping to recover the little he has lost. Sometimes he must yield her hand to a stranger, but never complain; never assert his rights; speak when she speaks, be silent when she is silent; know when speech or when silence will please her. Endure each insolence, each scorn, even at the cost of appearing a fool."

So far speaks the poet in the "Cavaliere Giocondo." To the poet and to ladies I answer in my heart: I also esteem

esteem a reasonable love, but, with such hard conditions —ladies, farewell! [*Goes.*

Cost. It wasn't enough for him to recite uneven verses, but he has added four more of his own. Who knows? If they got used to it they might like it. I say with the same poet in another metre:

"The caprices of mankind are various; some like tart and some like pies."

END OF ACT III, SCENE I.

ACT III. SCENE II.

A Large Room with a table set with lights, etc.

[MARIUCCIA *and servants preparing the room.*]

Serv. HOW many must we lay for ?

Mar. Eight.

Serv. But there are only seven of them. Is the old man coming too ?

Mar. Oh, the deaf old man knows nothing about it. This is a dinner, or rather a supper, ordered by Signora Costanza and Signora Silvestra. They don't want Signor Luca to know about it.

Serv. But if they're only seven perhaps they're waiting for some one else.

Mar. Isn't Signor Leonardo to come ? Did you go and invite him from me ?

Serv. Yes, of course ; I'd forgotten.

Mar. Some one's knocking ; go and see if it's he. Make him come in at once.

Serv. Signora Mariuccia, I do everything you want, but

but don't forget me. If they all eat I want to enjoy myself too.

Mar. Yes, yes, don't worry, there'll be enough for all; the old man pays.

Serv. [*Aside.*] When the servants agree things can never go wrong. [*Goes.*

Mar. I want to see if I can really annoy Signora Felicita. She'll be enraged when she sees her husband here.

Enter LEONARDO.

Leon. Here I am. What is the great hurry that you've made me come?

Mar. [*Pointing to the table.*] Look.

Leon. Well, I see a table laid for a meal.

Mar. Signora Felicita persuaded my mistress to do this and yet she hadn't the goodness to tell her poor husband of it.

Leon. Oh, the less my wife sees of me the better she feels!

Mar. I sent to bring you here and I want you to stay in spite of her.

Leon. Oh, not that! They haven't invited me and I don't want to stay.

Mar. Do it, for love of me.

Leon. No, you must excuse me. I am a gentleman and I don't like to make a spectacle of myself. I don't go where I am not gladly seen.

Mar. Well do this—if you like we'll eat together in my room.

Leon. Do you think I'd do a thing like that? I like eating; I like good meals, but I won't sacrifice my reputation to my gullet!

Mar. So you want to go away?

Leon. Naturally.

Mar. And leave your wife here to eat and drink and enjoy

enjoy herself without you. If you do that I tell you you're a stupid, a fool, a blockhead, a simpleton.

Leon. That's enough! Don't tire yourself by loading me with your amorous expressions! If I don't stay, you can't stay either.

Mar. And if they invited you, would you stay?

Leon. I wouldn't stay if they bound me with chains. It is a point of honour with me—I must go.

Mar. Here's your wife with my mistress.

Leon. Let her come, let her come; she comes at the right time.

Enter COSTANZA *and* FELICITA.

Cost. Oh! here's Signor Leonardo!

Fel. Are you here, husband?

Leon. [*To* FELICITA.] Indeed. Come home, signora!

Fel. Come home? What has happened? An accident?

Mar. [*Aside.*] I like this.

Leon. Come home, I say. This isn't the way to treat a husband.

Cost. [*To* FELICITA.] What's the matter with him?

Fel. [*To* COSTANZA.] Perhaps he's angry because we didn't ask him.

Leon. Mariuccia, kindly bring her cloak and let us go.

Mar. Yes, signore, immediately. [*Aside.*] Burst, you little fool. I'm glad of it! [*Goes.*

Cost. I can't believe that Signor Leonardo will insult me in this way.

Leon. So it is, signora. You must excuse me.

Fel. Have you met Signora Costanza's servant?

Leon. I know nothing about it.

Fel. I've just sent him to invite you here.

Leon. That won't do!

Cost. Signor Leonardo must honour me by staying.

Fel. I won't stay without my husband.

Cost. Of course—both or neither.

Fel.

Fel. My husband will stay willingly with Signora Costanza.

Leon. I say no, signora !

Cost. Yes, you must stay.

Fel. And I want him near me.

Cost. Put your cloak off.

Fel. And your hat.

Cost. I'll take it off his shoulders. [*Removes his cloak.*

Fel. Give me that great hat ?

Cost. Bravo, Signor Leonardo !

Fel. Long live my husband !

Cost. We'll be merry.

Fel. Now I'm happy.

Enter MARIUCCIA *with* FELICITA'S *cloak.*

Mar. Here's Signora Felicita's cloak.

Fel. Don't trouble, you affected creature ; I don't need it at present.

Cost. Take the cloak away, and don't play the fool.

Mar. [*Surprised.*] What does Signor Leonardo say ?

Leon. What can I say ? When women want they can make men do what they like.

Mar. Then you're staying here ?

Leon. I'm staying here. Can't you see they've taken my things off ?

Mar. I'm glad of it. I invited him.

Fel. You have greatly obliged me ; but if I were your mistress I would tell you that you are impertinent.

Mar. Are you jealous ?

Fel. I'm the devil, who plagues you !

Cost. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] Come ; get along with you.

Mar. Yes, yes, you're jealous, and I know why. Because I'm prettier than you. [*Goes.*

Fel. [*To* COSTANZA.] Do you put up with such insolence ?

Cost. Do you know why ? Because she does what I want,

want, backs me up in everything, and there's no danger of her telling the old man.

Leon. Ah, servants are often the ruin of a family.

Cost. Signore, do not think that I do foolish things.

Fel. Excuse him—my husband is boorish sometimes; he's a blunderer.

Leon. [*Angry.*] What do you say, wife?

Fel. My dear joy, don't get angry!

Leon. [*Aside.*] She's a great fool!

Enter servants, who place food on the table.

Serv. Dinner is served.

Cost. Go and tell my aunt and the gentlemen to come. [*A servant goes out.*

Leon. Really, signora, I don't like to disturb you.

Fel. [*To* LEONARDO.] Do you want us to leave?

Leon. I should prefer to leave.

Fel. [*Aside to* LEONARDO.] Stupid! There is macaroni worth a fortune!

Leon. Really?

Fel. Do you want to leave now?

Leon. Oh, I can't refuse Signora Costanza's kindness!

Enter the CAVALIERE *with* DOROTEA *and* PASQUINA, *one on each arm. Then enter the* COUNT *escorting* SILVESTRA.

Cav. Here I am, ladies, here I am, like Janus between the new world and the old. [*Indicating mother and daughter.*

Dor. I don't understand these expressions.

Pasq. [*Joyfully.*] The soup's on the table!

Cost. But where is the Count?

Cav. You will soon see Cupid with his preserved Venus.

Cost. Sometimes you're a little too witty.

Silv. Here we are, here we are! Have you been slandering us?

Count. That would indeed have been a slander upon charity.

Cost.

Cost. Come, let's sit down; the dinner's getting cold.

Fel. Show us our seats, Signora Costanza.

Cav. I'll do it, I'll do it! Here Signora Silvestra. The bride at the head of the table. [*Makes her sit down.*

Silv. You call me a bride?

Cav. [*Looking at the* COUNT.] So it seems to me, if I'm not wrong.

Silv. Ah, you little rogue!

Cav. Count, come here.

[*Calling him beside* SIGNORA SILVESTRA.

Count. Dear friend, go rather yourself.

Cav. Eh? Why do you want to hide yourself? Don't let's make a scene. This is your place.

Silv. Come, Count, here it is. He's right—don't hide yourself. Come beside me.

Cost. [*To the* COUNT.] Go along.

Count. Do you bid me?

Cost. I order you to.

Count. I go to obey you. [*Sits on* SILVESTRA's *left.*

Silv. [*To* COSTANZA.] Thank you, niece; I see you wish me well.

Cav. [*Pointing to the seat next the* COUNT.] Signora Costanza can come next.

Silv. No, no, excuse me, signore; that seat must go to a guest. Signora Dorotea must come next to the Count. [*Aside to* COUNT.] My niece is a virgin, she mustn't sit next to him.

Cav. [*To* SILVESTRA.] But aren't you a virgin, too?

Silv. Yes, but didn't you know? The Count and I will soon be one person.

Cav. You're right. Pray come here, Signora Dorotea, and your daughter next.

[DOROTEA *and* PASQUINA *take their places.*

Fel. [*Aside.*] The Cavaliere is most kind. He arranges things as if he owned the house.

Cav.

Cav. [*Pointing to the seat next* SILVESTRA.] Signora Costanza here.

Silv. No, Cavaliere. That is wrong in my opinion; the guests should be ranged alternately, a lady and a gentleman.

Cav. I'll sit there, then.

Silv. Yes, yes, that's better.

Cav. And then Signora Costanza. [*To* SILVESTRA.] Will that do?

Silv. Oh, yes, if she's next to you.

Cost. All the better, so long as aunt is pleased. [*Aside.*] We shall see her better in the end!

[*Sits down by the* CAVALIERE.

Cav. Then Signor Leonardo and Signora Felicita with him.

Fel. Husband and wife together?

Leon. [*To* FELICITA.] Don't you like to have me near you?

Fel. [*Ironically.*] On the contrary, it gives me the greatest pleasure.

Leon. [*Sitting down by* COSTANZA.] We are so seldom together. Put up with it for this evening.

Fel. Oh, I'm used to putting up with your being a fool.

[*Sits down by* LEONARDO. *The* COUNT *begins to serve every one, and from time to time the courses are changed and the servants bring fresh plates; they drink as they wish. Then the fruit is brought in, and they talk as follows, seated round the table, until* SIGNOR LUCA *comes in.*

Pasq. [*To* DOROTEA.] Give me some soup.

Dor. [*To the* CAVALIERE.] Please give my daughter some soup.

Cav. Here you are. [*Hands a plate with soup.*

Pasq. Is that all?

Cav. You want some more?

Pasq.

Pasq. We haven't had any at home for three days.

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA.] Be quiet.

Leon. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] Did you hear? They starve at home so they can go out masked.

Fel. [*Aside to* LEONARDO.] Oh, Dorotea's not the only one. There are lots more like her.

Cav. You're not eating, Signora Silvestra?

Silv. I'm eating more than any one.

Cav. How's that?

Silv. [*Looking at the* COUNT.] I'm eating with my eyes as well as my mouth.

Count. [*Aside.*] May you go blind then!

Cost. Is it true, Count, that you want to get married?

Count. If the lady I want will have me.

Silv. Yes, dear, she whom you love burns and sighs for you.

Count. Can I believe it, Signora Costanza?

Cost. Yes, believe it.

Silv. Do you hear? She confirms it, too.

Fel. [*Aside.*] Costanza is crafty—the double meaning is plain.

Cost. But she whom you wish to marry and who is not far from accepting you does not yet know really who you are.

Silv. Oh, I know enough! He's a handsome young man, well born, and I ask nothing better.

Cav. Pardon me, signora, your niece is more prudent than you. Girls can't get married blindly like that. She is interested on your account as much as for herself, and before her aunt marries she wants to know exactly who it is.

Count. The aunt is right and the niece speaks well. I am known in Venice and the introductions I have with me will bear me out. [*Shows some papers.*] Here they are if the aunt wants to see them.

Cost.

Cost. Give them here, give them here! I'll read them. I'm most interested in this affair. [*Takes the papers.*

Silv. I am much obliged to you, niece, but really there's no need for all this care. [*Aside to* COSTANZA; *the* CAVALIERE *hears also.*] What do you say, Cavaliere?

[COSTANZA *reads the papers to herself.*

Cav. You are perfectly right. [*Aside.*] Costanza knows what she's doing—the old woman will be nicely fooled.

Pasq. You're giving me nothing to eat.

Cav. [*To* DOROTEA.] Please help your daughter.

Dor. Wait! Nobody seems to want this dish. Let's share it.

[*Pulls the dish over and cuts it with* PASQUINA.

Leon. [*Aside to* FELICITA.] There's a wolf in those women!

Fel. [*Aside to* LEONARDO.] Don't make fun of them.

Enter BATTISTINO.

Batt. Good appetite to you all.

Pasq. Oh, here's Battistino!

Dor. You tracked us by the scent, eh?

Batt. I've been wandering three hours trying to find you.

Fel. [*Aside to* BATTISTINO.] Did you find your friend?

Batt. [*Aside.*] Who?

Fel. [*Aside.*] Signor Faloppa.

Batt. [*Aside.*] I tell you I've been out three hours and no one can tell me where he is.

Fel. [*Aside.*] Shall I tell you?

Batt. [*Aside.*] Yes, indeed?

Fel. [*Pointing to the* CAVALIERE.] There he is.

Batt. [*Aside.*] That man?

Fel. [*Aside.*] Yes.

Batt. [*To the* CAVALIERE.] Signor Faloppa!

Cav. Are you speaking to me?

Batt.

Batt. Yes, to you. A word with you, if you please.

Cav. Do you want me to baste [*faloppi*] your back with a cane ?

Batt. That girl is mine ; you leave her alone.

Dor. Poor fool ! My daughter doesn't know him.

Pasq. Are you called Cavaliere Faloppa, then ?

[*They all laugh.*

Cav. I'm called the blackguard who caught you.

[*Imitating her.*

Fel. Come, come, that's enough. Don't let a joke lead to disturbances. I had a little amusement at Signor Battistino's expense.

Batt. The devil ! [*Stamps his feet.*] Things like this make me mad. I won't be made a fool of. [*Rushes round the table to* PASQUINA.] I'm not a boy to be laughed at, and I won't have such things. [PASQUINA *puts some food in his mouth.*] I'll tell your father. I won't have any one make fun of me.

[*Speaks while eating what* PASQUINA *gives him.*

Fel. [*Aside.*] What a caricature !

Pasq. Come here and sit by me.

Dor. Are you angry ?

Batt. Oh, my rage is passing ! [*Sits down and eats.*

Cost. Aunt, I've read these papers which the Count gave me.

Silv. And what do you think of them ?

Cost. The Count is of good family. His fortune is sufficient ; his person, so far as I can see, is excellent ; so if he means what he says the wife he desires should not refuse him.

Silv. Refuse him ! Why, I desire him, I burn for him, and I'm burning with impatience to give him my hand.

Count. I thank you, Signora Costanza, for your gracious feelings, and since the lady is so well disposed we will make all haste possible.

Silv.

Silv. [*To the* CAVALIERE.] You hear? [*To the* COUNT.] Bless you!

Enter MARIUCCIA.

Mar. Signora, signora!

Cost. What is it?

Mar. The master called. He said he wanted some food. He's coming up the stairs and I think he's coming here.

Cost. Didn't you say he was asleep?

Mar. He was asleep, but he suddenly woke up and asked for food.

Cav. Well, let him come; we'll make him dream.

Silv. What does the old man want? Old people ought to leave us young ones alone.

Cost. My father will not mind our having a party, but he will be annoyed—and rightly—because we didn't ask him to join us. Old people make a great fuss about these things. I am very troubled about it.

Count. The meal is over. We can go into another room. [*They get up.*

Cost. Yes, yes, we can go to my room. Mariuccia, make the coffee and bring it there.

Silv. I liked so much the coffee I drank this morning. Send for some to the Café dell' Aquila. [*Aside.*] That café-keeper is a young man to my liking.

Cost. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] Send a servant to the Aquila—let us have it as soon as possible.

Cav. In Venice the coffee bought at shops always seems better than that made at home.

Mar. Do you hear? The old man's in the hall. He'll be here directly.

Silv. Let us go away and complete this marriage.

Cost. That is what chiefly occupies me, but if my father sees this table he will want to know what has been going on.

Cav.

Cav. Come, come, ladies ; trust to me. I think I can get you out of the difficulty. Listen to me.

[*Speaks aside to* MARIUCCIA.

Silv. [*To the* COUNT.] Come, dear, in a little time we shall be happy.

Count. [*To* COSTANZA.] That is what I want.

Cost. [*To the* COUNT.] That is what I want.

[*All three go out.*

Leon. [*To* FELICITA.] Can't we go home now ?

Fel. Do you think I would miss the end of this ? I say, as he said : now comes in the best part. [*Goes.*

Leon. Wonderful women ! Never satisfied ! I will stay too. I want to see if I can succeed in taking her home to-night. I've slept alone for five nights. [*Goes.*

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA *and* BATTISTINO.] Shall we go ?

Pasq. Of course ! I want some coffee. [*Goes.*

Batt. If Pasquina wants coffee, I do, too. [*Goes.*

Dor. Yes, I've eaten so much it will do my stomach good. [*Goes.*

Cav. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] You understand ?

Mar. I understand everything. Here's the old man. I'll go at once so that he doesn't see me. [*Goes.*

Enter LUCA *and servants, who during the scene clear the table silently.*

Cav. I'll amuse myself with the old man.

[*Takes off his waistcoat and puts on an apron and a cap on his head like those worn by waiters in a café.*

Luca. I keep calling and no one answers. What's happened now ? The devil ! There's been a fine dinner here. And I knew nothing about it. They spend my money and tell me nothing ! Who's there ? Nobody.

[*The* CAVALIERE *comes forward, cap in hand.*

Luca. Who are you ? I don't know you.

[CAVALIERE *makes signs that he is a servant.*

Luca. [*Aside.*] I don't ever remember that this fellow was one

one of my servants. Unless my sister or daughter engaged him. [*Aloud.*] Who are you ?

[CAVALIERE *seems to reply, but only makes motions with his mouth without saying anything.*

Luca. What ? [CAVALIERE, *as above.*

Luca. I don't understand. What's your name ?

[CAVALIERE, *as before.*

Luca. Speak loud in my ear. [CAVALIERE, *as before.*

Luca. [*Aside.*] The devil ! I've become totally deaf. [*Aloud.*] Come the other side. [CAVALIERE *goes across.*

Luca. Come here, tell me who you are.

[CAVALIERE, *as before.*

Luca. Speak loud !

[CAVALIERE *seems to shout but makes no noise.*

Luca. [*Aside.*] Good God ! I'm absolutely deaf. I can't hear anything. [*Aloud.*] Tell me by signs at least who you are. What is the room ? Who had this dinner ?

[CAVALIERE *makes a bow and goes.*

Luca. I don't know if he heard me or didn't hear me, if he answered me or didn't answer me. Perhaps in the two hours I've been asleep the tympanum of my ear has become hardened.

[CAVALIERE *returns with a bottle, a glass, and a serviette over his arm and offers him a drink.*

Luca. I don't want a drink I want to know what has happened. [CAVALIERE *beseeches him by signs to drink.*

Luca. The women must have changed the butler without telling me. He wants me to taste the wine.

[*Tries to take the glass.*

[*The* CAVALIERE *drinks the wine, bows and goes.*

Luca. Eh ! The wine isn't bad. A little sharp though ?

[CAVALIERE *returns and makes signs he wants to be paid.*

Luca. What ? You want to be paid ? First of all I didn't drink anything, and then must I pay in my own house ? [CAVALIERE *makes signs that it isn't his house.*

Luca.

Luca. Not my house? What is it, an inn!

[CAVALIERE *nods.*

Luca. The devil! I can't remember getting drunk. I don't feel drunk. Perhaps I'm still asleep and this is a dream? I dreamed before of things that seemed true. But when you dream, you don't reason. I must be in another world. Let's see what this mix-up is. [*Shouts.*] Mariuccia, Tojolo, Bernadino!

[CAVALIERE *makes signs that he is ready to do his bidding.*

Luca. I want to go into the room. Give me a little light. [CAVALIERE *takes a light.*

Luca. Now I shall see if it's an illusion or if I'm awake.

[CAVALIERE *returns with the candle.*

Luca. If it's a dream the candle won't burn me. [*Touches the flame and burns himself.*] Ah!

[CAVALIERE *blows out the light and goes. The servants finish carrying out the table.*

Luca. Help! I've burned myself! Damnation! I'm left in the dark! Mariuccia, Costanza, every one, help!

Enter MARIUCCIA *with a light.*

Mar. What is it, master? What has happened?

Luca. Where's he gone?

Mar. [*Very loud.*] Who?

Luca. The waiter, the servant, the devil who was here!

Mar. Nobody's been here.

Luca. What?

Mar. [*Very loud.*] Nobody's been here.

Luca. [*Aside.*] Now I hear and just now I didn't hear. This is a thing makes me tremble all over. [*Aloud.*] Where is the table that was here?

Mar. [*Very loud.*] What table?

Luca. The table that was laid.

Mar. You've been dreaming.

Luca. What?

Mar.

Mar. [*Very loud.*] You've been asleep; you've been dreaming.

Luca. Dreaming! And the candle-burn?

Mar. [*Very loud.*] A dream!

Luca. A dream? That a dream, too! But how did I get in this room?

Mar. [*Very loud.*] You must have walked in your sleep.

Luca. Walked in my sleep! There are sleep-walkers. I don't know what to say. I didn't know I was a sleep-walker. After this lock me in from the outside; I don't want to walk out of my room and fall downstairs. [*Goes.*

Mar. That's all right. If he wants to go out we shall know as well and he won't be able to disturb us if we're having a little party.

END OF SCENE II.

ACT III. SCENE III.

A Large Lighted Room.

COSTANZA, FELICITA, SILVESTRA, DOROTEA, PASQUINA, *the* COUNT, LEONARDO, BATTISTINO *and* NICCOLÒ, *the café-keeper, with other servants. Enter the* CAVALIERE. *They all come forward, pull up chairs and sit down to drink coffee.*

Cav. IT went off splendidly. Poor Signor Luca took it all in. He thinks he was dreaming and Mariuccia backed up the joke wonderfully.

Cost. Bravo, Cavaliere! You were made for witty inventions.

Cav. I've learned one or two things since I have had the honour of being with the good-humoured ladies.

Nicc. [*To* SILVESTRA.] Another lump of sugar?

Silv. Yes, didn't I tell you I like sweets?

Nicc. Help yourself, then, as you want.

Silv. Ah, Niccolò, do you know I'm getting married?

Nicc.

Nicc. I am infinitely glad of it.

Pasq. [*To* DOROTEA.] Mother, will the Count marry that ugly old woman ?

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA.] He may, but I don't think so.

Cav. Gentlemen, what does this silence mean ? I understood just now that a promise of marriage was proposed. If the parties consent, why not conclude it at once ?

Silv. The Cavaliere is right. Why not conclude it at once ?

Count. What says Signora Costanza ?

Silv. What's it to do with Signora Costanza ?

Count. I like to have her opinion.

Cost. For my part, I think that before concluding anything we should hear my father, who is the head and master of the house.

Leon. You say well. Once this was always done, but now everything is changed by fashion.

Silv. Oh, you're here with your old-fashioned ideas ! Yes, signore, we want to do this fashionably.

Fel. Dear Signora Silvestra, this marriage can't take place without Signor Luca. Who else would give the dowry ?

Silv. Call him if you must call him, but he's so deaf it'll be hours before you make him understand.

Cost. [*To a servant.*] Go and ask my father if he will be good enough to come here. [*Servant goes.*] I have thought of something which will save us the trouble of tiring ourselves with one who is deaf and will spare him, too. Wouldn't it be best to write down the contract, give it him to read, and, if he agrees to it, have it signed ?

Cav. You are perfectly right, Signora Costanza. I will set it down in a few words. Count, are you content ?

Count.

Count. Perfectly. Write it and I'll sign it.

Silv. [*Aside.*] I'm annoyed that I can't see to write without glasses, and I'm ashamed to bring them out.

[*The* CAVALIERE *retires to a small table and writes.*

Batt. Signora Dorotea, hearing this talk of marriage, the most wonderful idea has come to me.

Dor. What's that ?

Batt. Body of Bacchus ! Laugh—it's a laughing matter. I thought that, at this very moment, I would affiance myself with Pasquina.

Dor. You know, I think that's a very good idea. If you want, you can bind yourselves at once.

Batt. With your permission, ladies and gentlemen. Give me your hand, fair one.

Dor. [*To* PASQUINA.] Answer him : I take your hand, my dear.

Batt. I am your true love.
Ah, how glad I am !

[*All applaud and shout "Bravo ! Splendid !"*

Silv. But when is my brother coming ? I can't wait any longer.

Cav. He's coming now, and here's the contract written fairly.

Enter LUCA *and* MARIUCCIA.

Luca. What is it ? What do you want ?

Cav. [*Very loud.*] Please read this.

Luca. Hey, hey ! It seems to me I saw you in a dream ! Who are you ?

Cav. [*Very loud.*] Please read it.

Luc. [*Aside.*] He's deaf. Let's see what's in this paper. [*Puts on his spectacles and reads.*

Silv. [*Aside.*] My brother will be amazed when he knows I'm getting married !

Luca. [*To* COSTANZA.] Bravo ! I'm delighted.

Cost.

Cost. Thank you.

Silv. What have you got to thank him for? I'm the lady, amn't I?

Luca. [*To the* COUNT.] And the Count? Bravo!

Count. If you please . . .

Luca. What?

Count. If you think me worthy I ask her in marriage.

Luca. Hey?

Count. I ask her in marriage.

Luca. And you ask me when it's all arranged? You deserve that I should say "No." [*Aside.*] But this girl in the house doesn't please me. Now there's a chance I think it's best to get rid of her. I know the Count's family, and, though he's a foreigner, I know his income, and I think he'll be a good son. The thing turns out luckily, and we'll fix it at once. [*Aloud.*] I will give you the dowry; but don't let's waste time. Join hands at once.

Count. Then, full of joy and gladness, I give my right hand to my dear wife.

[*Passes his hand in front of* SILVESTRA, *who tries to take it; but he gives it to* COSTANZA.

Silv. What are you doing?

Count. I give my hand to my wife.

Silv. And who is your wife?

Count. Signora Costanza.

Silv. Are you the wife?

Cost. Yes, signora. You're young; you'll not miss the time.

Silv. [*To* COUNT.] Boor! Scoundrel! You don't deserve me! I never loved or esteemed you! I did it out of pity because you pined for me. [*To the* CAVALIERE.] But my heart, my affection, all went to this amiable cavaliere!

Cav. I thank you, signora. You are rich, I am a poor man.

man. I have not enough money to assure a dowry for sixty years.

Silv. O poor deceived youth!

[*Throws herself into a chair, and remains melancholy, hiding her face.*

Fel. Niccolò.

Nicc. Signora.

Fel. Come here; I want to speak to you.

Nicc. At your service.

Fel. Listen. [*Speaks in* COSTANZA's *ear.*] Is it all right? Shall we do it?

Cost. [*To* FELICITA.] Yes, we'll do it. Take this key, open the wardrobe and you'll find a suit of my father's.

Fel. Come on.

Nicc. As you bid. [*They go.*

Luca. Mariuccia.

Mar. Signore.

Luca. Mariuccia! Are you deaf?

Mar. That goes without saying. [*Loud.*] Here I am; what do you want?

Luca. Please tell me in my ear what they've just been saying.

Mar. [*Loud.*] They say it's late and you can go to sleep.

Luca. Why doesn't my sister go? She's three years older than I am.

Silv. [*To* LUCA.] Liar! It's not true. I was born so many years after you that I might be your daughter. I'm strong, healthy and well; I've not got the diseases you have.

Luca. What's she say?

Mar. [*Loud.*] I didn't understand.

Luca. Ugh! Deaf!

Fel. [*Returning.*] Signore, there is a strange gentleman here who wishes to see Signora Silvestra.

Silv.

Silv. A strange gentleman who wants to see me? I will go and meet him!

Cost. No, signora; stay here. Do you think a girl ought to make advances to a stranger?

Silv. I'm impatient. Make him come in at once.

Fel. [*Calling off.*] This way, signore.

Luca. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] What is it?

Mar. I don't know.

Enter NICCOLÒ *in good clothes, but awkward in his peruke.*

Nicc. [*To* SILVESTRA.] Madam, your très-humble serviteur.

Silv. Monsieur, votre servant.

[NICCOLÒ *bows to them. All see the joke, except* LUCA *and* SILVESTRA. *They whisper to each other and laugh quietly.*

Luca. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] Who is it?

Mar. The duke of the impossible.

Luca. What?

Mar. The prince of perdition.

Luca. Who?

Mar. [*Aloud.*] The devil, who'll take you.

Luca. May he drag you off.

Nicc. [*To* SILVESTRA.] Madame . . .

Silv. Monsieur, pardonnez-moi; je ne suis pas madame mais mademoiselle.

Nicc. Mademoiselle, je saw you l'autre soir at the ball, and your beauté so wounded my heart that je can't forbear protesting to you mon respect et mon obéissance.

Silv. Eh, Monsieur le Cavalier, votre très-humble servante de tout mon cœur.

Nicc. Donnez-moi la main.

Silv. Vous me faites beaucoup d'honneur.

Nicc. [*Kisses her hand.*] Ah, vous êtes adorable!

Silv. [*To the* COUNT *and* CAVALIERE.] Yes, yes, rage and spite; the grapes are sour!

Nicc.

Nicc. Madam, êtes-vous épousée ?

Silv. What do you say ?

Nicc. Êtes-vous mariée ?

Silv. No, signore, I'm still a virgin.

Nicc. S'il vous plaît, madame, je suis pour vous.

Silv. To so gracious a cavalier "No" cannot be said. [*Aside.*] Yes, out of spite.

Luca. [*To* MARIUCCIA.] What are they saying ?

Mar. [*Loud.*] He wants to marry Signora Silvestra.

Luca. My sister wants to get married ? Devil take her ! What worse thing could I hear ?

Silv. Yes, signore, I want to get married ; it's nothing to do with you.

Cost. [*To the* CAVALIERE]. The joke's going too far. Can't you see it will make unpleasantness ?

Cav. [*To* COSTANZA.] Wait a bit. I'll finish it.

Luca. Who is it wants you ? A mad man ?

Silv. A gentleman of wit !

Nicc. [*To* LUCA.] Votre serviteur très-humble.

Cav. Niccolò !

Nicc. Signore ?

Cav. The master's waiting for the coffee.

[*A servant hands the tray with the cups to* NICCOLÒ *who takes off the peruke and makes a bow.*

Nicc. Your most humble servant, gentlemen.

Silv. Oh ! I am murdered ! Rascals ! Rogues ! Deceivers ! Yes, I'd get married, if you imagine I'd take a smith, a carpenter, a scavenger !

[*Goes off in a rage.*

Luca. What's happened ?

Cav. Nothing, signore. Jests, a farce—things that are done to amuse the "good-humoured." And indeed you can't say that these are not "good-humoured ladies." I hope to heaven that those who have patiently heard them with so much kindness won't go away bad-humoured. I will

I will end with these two verses which I heard at the end of a comedy called "Il Terenzio."

"Terence said to the Romans : applaud.
To our listeners we say : thank you."

THE END.

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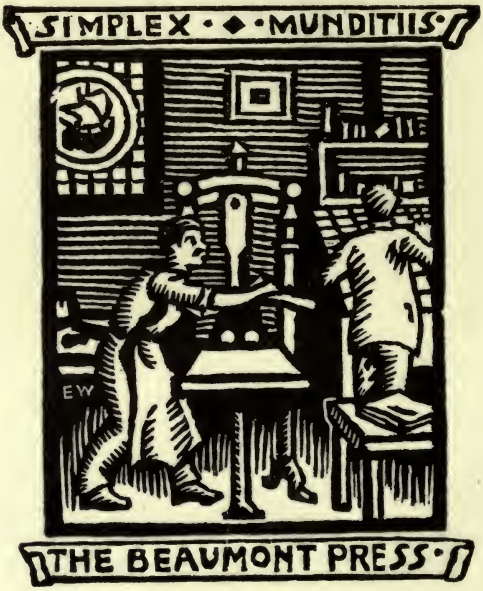

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